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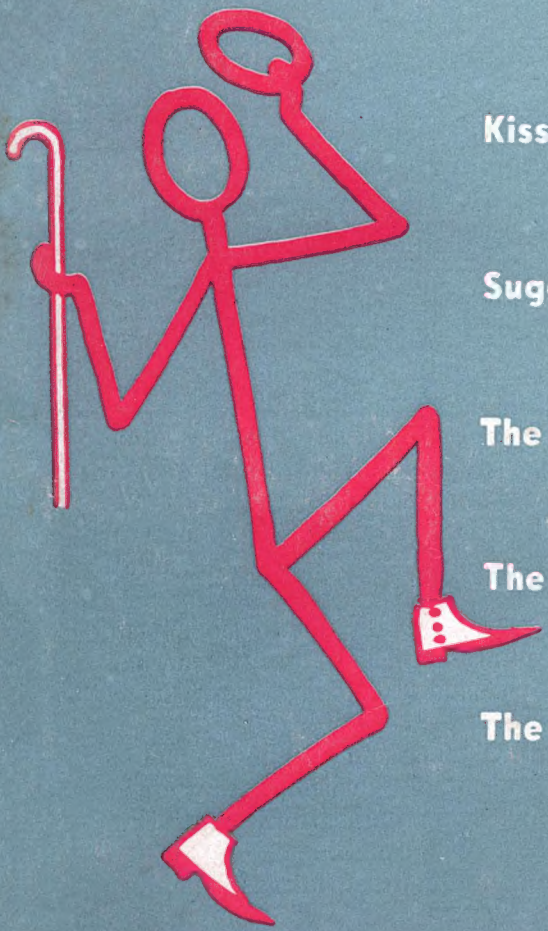
Edited by LESLIE CHARTERIS



Kiss of Kandahar
by Lawrence G. Blochman

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by T. S. Stribling

The Ghosts of Suicide Corner
by E. Phillips Oppenheim

The Hidden Law
by Melville Davisson Post

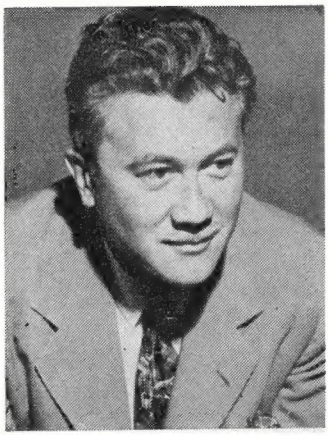
The Sergeant and the Skunks
by Clifford Knight

THE EVER-LOVING SPOUSE

A NEW SAINT STORY by LESLIE CHARTERIS

SOME OLD, SOME NEW — THE FINEST IN MYSTERY FICTION

A KING-SIZE PUBLICATION



THUS FAR, there have been nine movies made about the Saint, six in Hollywood and three in England. I say this not to blow my trumpet, but in sorrow. In my opinion none of the actors who have tackled the part ever gave an interpretation that remotely resembled my own vision of the character, and if my opinion on this subject is not the best qualified in the world I might as well deliver myself to the embalmers right now. And with one solitary exception which I wrote myself, the scripts bore a relationship to my original stories which at best was infinitesimal and more often was simply and totally non-existent.

After the last caricature, I was disgusted enough and at the same time happily solvent enough to vow that I would never submit Simon to such indignities again. But last summer, a young and persistent French director, armed with an engaging manner and an adequate supply of francs, persuaded me to take one more chance. The idea was novel and intriguing enough: what would a French production make of the Saint? Certainly the country that sired d'Artagnan, the Saint's spiritual ancestor, and Arsène Lupin, his forerunner in crime, should be able to grasp his personality; the technicians who made such films as *Rififi* and *Diabolique* are masters of treating crime on celluloid; and perhaps that Gallic gaiety and wit would handle the Saint with some of the lightness and sophistication that the mentality of Hollywood could never grasp.

So finally a deal was made, but with a reservation born of my past bitter experiences: unless the final production pleases me, it can be shown only in non-English-speaking countries, and you readers of these lines will never be exposed to it.

I feel that this explanation is needed because some publicity about the project has already appeared and brought us questions from such alert fans as Mr. H. A. Stein of New York, who found the item in the Paris column of *Variety*, and by the time this is published I shall be in Europe myself, trying to help make this one picture I'm not ashamed of. If I succeed, I'll waste no time telling you.

Meanwhile you'll still have to get along with such legible fare as Clifford Knight's newest, THE SERGEANT AND THE SKUNKS, backed up by such reliables as Blochman, Stribling, Oppenheim, and Post, eked out with the latest side dish (THE EVER-LOVING SPOUSE) concocted by your editorial host, who thinks the Saint would have more fun with Brigitte Bardot.

Leslie Charteris

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SAN JOSE, CALIFORNIA, U. S. A.

THE ® saint
MYSTERY MAGAZINE
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the ever-loving spouse

by . . . Leslie Charteris

The Saint was always ready to assist the distressed —sometimes even when they didn't want it. . . .

THE SAINT met Otis Q. Fennick on the fire escape of the Hotel Mercurio, in San Francisco, at about 4 o'clock in the morning.

Like many another eminently simple statement, the foregoing now involves an entirely disproportionate series of explanations.

Simon Templar was staying at the Mercurio, which was a long way from attaining the luxurious standards of the kind of hotel that he usually frequented, because when he headed for San Francisco he had neglected to inform himself that a national convention of the soft drink and candy industry was concurrently infesting that otherwise delightful city. After finding every superior hostelry clogged to the rafters with manufacturers and purveyors of excess calories, he had decided that he was lucky to find a room in any hotel at all.

The room itself was one of the least desirable even under that second-rate roof, being situated at the back of the building overlooking a picturesque alley tastefully bordered with garbage cans and directly facing an eye-filling panorama of grimy windows and still grimier walls appertaining

Simon Templar had no objection to charming ladies — but he did disapprove of charming ladies who were too greedy.

to the edifice across the way. The iron steps of the outside fire escape partly obscured this appealing view by slanting across the upper half of the window; and it was there that Simon first heard the stealthy feet of Mr. Fennick, and a moment later, being of a curious disposition, saw them through a gap at the edge of the ill-fitting blind. He had dined at his friend Johnny Kan's temple of oriental gastronomy on Grant Avenue for old times' sake, and afterwards Johnny had insisted that they should go out together and look for some late entertainment that might not have been discovered by the assembled exploiters of appetizing toothache, and what with one thing and another it had been very late when he got home, and he had only just shed most of his clothes and brushed his teeth when he heard the furtive scuffling outside which was the surreptitious descent of Mr. Fennick.

In such a situation, the ordinary sojourner in even a second-rate hotel would either have remained gawking in numb perplexity or have started howling an alarum, with or without the intermediacy of the house phone. Not being ordinary in any way, Simon Templar rolled up the shade with a craftsman's touch which almost miraculously silenced its antique mechanism—he had already switched off the lights in order to see out better, and the window had never been closed since he accepted the room, on account of the stuffiness of its location — and swung himself across to the nearest landing of the fire escape with the deceptively effortless grace of a trained gymnast, having reacted with such dazzling speed that he arrived there simultaneously with the cautiously groping prowler.

"Me Tarzan," said the Saint seductively. "You Jane?"

His voice should not have been at all terrifying—in fact, it was carefully pitched low enough to have been inaudible to anyone who had not already been disturbed by Mr. Fennick's rather clumsy creeping. But Mr. Fennick was apparently unused to being accosted on fire escapes, or perhaps even to being on them at all; at any rate, it was immediately obvious that no intelligible sound was going to emerge for a while from the fishlike opening of his mouth. It became clear to Simon that the acquaintance would have to be developed in a more leisurely manner and less unconventional surroundings.

"You'd better come in before you catch cold or break your neck," he said.

Mr. Fennick gave him no struggle. He was a small man, and the Saint's steel fingers almost met their thumb around the upper arm that they had persuasively clamped on. He

squeezed his eyes very tightly shut, like a little boy, as Simon half lifted him across the space to the window sill which was really no more than a long stride except for having about 40 feet of empty air under it.

With the blind drawn and the lights on again, the Saint inspected his catch with proprietary interest. Mr. Fennick wore a well-pressed brown double-breasted suit of conservative tailoring, a white stiff-collared shirt, a tie very modestly patterned with neutral greens, and even a clean felt hat of sedate contour. To match his skinny frame, he had a rather wizened face with a sharp thin nose, a wide thin mouth, and lively intelligent brown eyes when he opened them. He looked much more like a member of some Chamber of Commerce and pillar of the Community Church than a felonious skulker on fire escapes.

"You know," said the Saint at last, "I don't think you're a burglar after all. And this would be a rather desperate hour for a Peeping Tom. I guess you must be a candy cooker."

"That's right," Mr. Fennick said eagerly. "The Fennick Candy Company. You must have heard of it."

He whipped out a wallet and extracted a card from it with an automatic dexterity which even his temporarily shattered condition could not radically unhinge. He went on, in a kind of delirious incantation: "Jumbo Juicies, Crunchy Wunchies, Crackpops, Yummigum—"

"That sounds like a powerful spell," said the Saint respectfully. "Now are you supposed to vanish in a puff of smoke, or am I?"

"I wish I could," said Mr. Otis Q. Fennick, President, forlornly.

Having read everything on the card, Simon put it down on the dresser and picked up a cigarette.

"It begins to seem as if you have a problem," he said. "But presumably it isn't anything so sordid as not being able to pay your bill. You weren't doing the moonlight flit, were you?"

"Oh, dear me, no! I'm quite comfortably well off, I assure you. In fact, I was most upset with the convention Committee for booking me into a place like this. Of course, they said that all the rooms were allotted by drawing names out of a hat, but I noticed that they all got the Mark Hopkins or the Drake. This isn't at all the class of hotel I'd choose for myself."

"We have that in common, anyhow."

"I don't remember seeing you at any of the meetings. What's your line?"

"I was referring to our taste in hotels, Otis. I've never taken much interest in candy, unless it happened to be poisoned."

"Oh." Mr. Fennick looked pardonably vague. "Well, I am

attending this soft-drink and candy convention which you may have heard of—"

"I could hardly help it. It stuck me with this dump—and me not even a delegate. So what were you doing just now? Trying to sneak in on one of your competitors and steal his secret formula for the ultimate frightful blend of peppermint, popcorn, and peanut butter, with the miracle self-inflating ingredient and the atomic crackle?"

"No, nothing like that—"

"Then it must have been his new sales gimmick to top your offer of a rocket trip to Venus in exchange for fifty million Crunchy Wunchy wrappers."

Mr. Fennick blinked at him.

"You must be misinformed, sir. The Fennick Candy Company never made any such offer."

"Then I'll make you a present of the idea. So what *were* you doing?"

"Well, I suppose I was just in a panic. I knew I was being framed."

"Maybe you were," said the Sanit cheerfully. "But I still don't get the picture. Why don't you begin at the beginning?"

Mr. Fennick gulped, wriggled miserably, and took a deep breath like a diver about to plunge.

"All right. I was out last night—it would be last night, wouldn't it?—I was out with some business connections. We had dinner at the Sheraton Palace, and went to some night clubs. We were at the Forbidden City, and Bimbo's. Of course, we drank quite a lot—"

"Coke, or chemical fruit punch?"

"No, I like a real drink when I go out. But I wasn't drunk. You must believe me. I only mentioned it to explain why I must have fallen asleep especially soundly when I got to bed, which was about two o'clock."

"Why must you?"

"Because when I woke up, there was this girl in bed with me, with nothing on. And I hadn't heard her come in, or get undressed, or anything."

The Saint's blue eyes became slightly wider.

"Wow! . . . I mean, that must have been disappointing. You probably missed the best striptease of the evening."

"I give you my word, sir, I'm not used to anything like that. At least, not at such close quarters."

"Don't be discouraged, chum. It may grow on you yet, the *savoir faire* comes with practise. What did you do—offer her some Yummigum?"

"I think I woke up when the lights suddenly went on. Or when she leaned over and put her arms around me. Both things seemed to happen together. I was completely fuddled, of course. And then, before I could really get my bearings at all, the light blinded me. I think there was someone

else in the room, but I was too dazzled to have anything more than an impression. And then, something hit me on the head, and it hurt terribly, and everything went black. It all seems like a bad dream now, except . . ."

The little man took off his prim felt hat and gingerly touched the upper side of his cranium. The mousey hair had ebbed far enough from that region for the Saint without even coming closer to authenticate a swelling that was already making its first experiments with the palette of color effects.

"What happened when you woke up again?" Simon asked.

"There wasn't anyone there. Except me, of course. And as soon as I could think it out, I knew I'd been framed. That blinding light—obviously, a flash bulb. Somebody had taken a picture of me, in that *awful* situation."

"Was this doll really gruesome?"

"No. No, not at all. That's what makes it so dreadful. In fact, she was . . . well, er—"

"Stacked?"

Mr. Fennick winced, his pallor taking on a definite tint of rose.

"I don't particularly like such vulgar expressions. But, yes, if someone was planning to blackmail me, I suppose she'd be the type they'd use."

"Then all may not be lost," said the Saint consolingly. "If some prankster in this Convention is trying to sabotage your bid to be elected Supreme Lollipop by charging you with dissolute habits, the foul conspiracy may yet boomerang. With your new reputation as the Confectionery Casanova, you might become the hero of the Convention. Think what a few shots like that did for Brigitte Bardot."

"I am hardly in the same category," said Mr. Fennick severely. "And in my case, that'd be all my wife would need."

Simon Templar nodded.

"Aha. Now it starts to make sense. I gather that Mrs. Fennick isn't here with you."

"No, she's home in New York."

"Enjoying The Theatre, The Ballet, and The Mink, no doubt."

"Yes, she likes all those things. And she thinks conventions are just an excuse for a lot of men to cut loose and — well, you know . . ."

"Get into the sort of mischief you were photographed in?"

"Exactly."

"So that if you tried to explain that snapshot the way you've told it to me, you'd expect a fairly hilarious reception."

"I wouldn't have the least chance of convincing her."

"I see." The Saint produced a thoughtful aureole of smoke. "But at the risk of seeming to harp on the subject, chum, I'm still trying to find out why you

were cavorting on the fire escape."

Mr. Fennick wrung his hands —it was the first time Simon had seen that well-worn cliché actually performed, and it corrected his lifelong delusion that it was merely a slightly archaic figure of speech.

"As I told you, I went into a funk. The only thing I could think of was to find the young woman and try to persuade her that whatever she'd been paid for playing her part, I could make it a little more worth her while to testify to the truth."

"Because that'd certainly be less than half what the photographer or *his* boss would be expecting to collect. Not bad thinking, for a guy who just came out of a conk on the noggin. But what made you think she'd be hanging on the wall outside?"

"Nothing. But I had an idea where to begin looking."

The Saint's eyes narrowed fractionally.

"So you did know her, after all."

"I had seen her once before," Mr. Fennick said precisely. "As a matter of fact, that's what made it seem so specially shocking and like a dream when I woke up and saw her without—um—the way I described her. She works in the bar downstairs, in the hotel, with one of those flashlight cameras, getting customers to have souvenir pictures taken."

"Then why didn't you go down in the elevator, like any respectably indignant customer, and start yelling for the manager?"

"Because I felt certain that somebody on the staff must have been in on the plot. I'm always very careful about locking my door in hotels. Somebody must have given those people a key, or let them in to my room. It might have been the elevator boy, or the night clerk—"

"Why couldn't they have used the fire escape too?"

"My window was only open a few inches, and there's a safety chain on the inside. I expect yours has one too, because of the fire escape being so close. I remembered to make sure the chain was fastened before I went to bed—I don't carry an excessive amount of cash with me, but I don't believe in taking unnecessary chances. . . Well, I thought, if any of the other accomplices see me looking for the girl, they'll know I recognized her, and they'd do anything to keep us apart."

"Didn't you think anyone would see you talking to her in the bar?"

"That's why I had to take such extreme steps to avoid the lobby. I intended to wait outside, hoping to follow her when she went home."

Simon regarded Mr. Fennick with increasing respect. It was becoming indisputably manifest that in spite of his somewhat dehydrated aspect, prissy person-

ality, and fluttering agitation, this bonbon baron had something more active than nougat in his noodle.

"I couldn't have figured it any better myself if I'd had all the facts," he murmured, picking up his recently discarded shirt and sliding an idle arm into a sleeve. "But by the same logic, Otis, old bean, I think this is where I'll have to take over."

The little man stared. "You?"

"There's nothing wrong with your analysis except that it stops short. Never mind about being seen talking to this chick—you can't even afford to let *her* hear you. Suppose she doesn't go for your bid, which could happen for a whole flock of reasons. You'd only have told the Ungodly how scared they've got you, and bang goes any chance of bluffing them out of a showdown. Whereas someone else could move in as your representative, proving you're not all alone in the world, and talking tough, and maybe give 'em some worries they weren't expecting."

Mr. Fennick pursed his lips, with commendable acuteness for a man in his disconcerting predicament.

"Quite possibly; but why should you, Mr.—"

"Templar. Simon Templar."

In those later days of the Saint's career, it was no longer such a potentially interesting moment when he gave his real name to a stranger for the first time. The range of possible reactions had become rather standardized. Still, there was always the hope of evoking some absolutely novel response.

Mr. Fennick inclined his head with mechanical politeness.

"—Mr. Templar," he continued, with hardly a break. "I've already imposed on you enough—"

"But I insist," said the Saint genially. "And if you give me any trouble, I might have to call the house detective, if this roach farm has such a person, and turn you in as a captured burglar."

He had tucked in his shirt tails and almost absentmindedly knotted a tie while this part of the conversation went on; and now by simply shrugging into a coat he was suddenly so completely dressed and ready for any eventuality that his uninvited guest could only open and shut his mouth ineffectually.

"Don't go away, Otis," he said from the door. "Just in case your pals haven't run out of cute tricks, or in case we might have to pull some quaint switch of our own, it might be clever not to give anyone a chance to prove you've been in your room lately. Who knows—we might even dare them to prove that that picture wasn't taken years before you got married, or even that it's your picture at all. Anyhow, wait till I bring you the first bulletin."

He was gone before he could be delayed by any further argument.

The elevator was piloted by the same jockey who had taken him up only a little while ago, an elderly individual with drooping shoulders and an air of comatose resignation to the infinite monotony of endlessly identical vertical voyages. He revealed no curiosity or interest whatsoever in why the Saint should want to ride down again at such an hour: one felt that he had long since been anesthetized against anything that could happen in a hotel during a convention, and perhaps at any other time.

"Tell me," said the Saint, with elaborately casual candor. "If I wanted to play a joke on one of the fellows—a friend of mine—could you let me into his room?"

The man did not even turn his head. In fact, for a number of seconds he appeared to have been afflicted with deafness, until at the ultimate limit of plausible cogitation he wrung from himself a single word of decision:

"Depends."

"On what?"

The instant the words were out of his mouth, Simon knew he had been too fast. The man pointedly made him wait even longer for the next reply, as a form of corrective discipline.

"Plenty."

The lift shuddered to a stop at the ground floor, and the gate rumbled open. The pilot held it, waiting for the Saint to disembark, with such total lack of eagerness to pursue the conversation that except for his minimal movements it would have been easy to believe that he was stuffed.

Simon got out, and followed the direction of a neon arrow which proclaimed that it pointed to The Rowdy Room. This proved to be a depressingly under-lighted cavern decorated in blood red and funeral black, with a dance floor large enough for a minuet by four midgets and an orchestra alcove furnished with an upright piano and stands for two other instrumentalists, all of whom had obviously racked up all the overtime they wanted and called it a day. The only rowdiness left was being provided by a quartet of diehards in one corner, two of whom were foggily listening to some obscure argument being loudly elaborated by the third, while the fourth was frankly falling asleep. The bartender, listlessly polishing glasses, accepted the Saint's arrival with a disinterested stare which barely suggested that if Simon wanted anything he could ask for it.

Simon ordered a Peter Dawson on the rocks, and after he had tasted it he said: "Where's the gal who takes the pictures?"

"Norma? She ain't here."

"That settles one thing," said the Saint mildly. "I was wondering if she'd become invisible."

The barman squinted at him suspiciously, and said: "She went home early. Had a headache or sump'n."

"Would you know where I can get in touch with her?"

"She'll be here tomorrow."

"That's the trouble—I may be leaving in the afternoon, much earlier than she'd come to work. I wanted to see her about some pictures that were taken the other night."

"Well, whyncha say so?" demanded the bartender aggrievedly.

He fumbled through some litter beside the cash register, and turned back with a card. The ornate printing on it could be reduced to "VERE BALTON, Photography," and an address, 685 Scoden Street.

"I thought you called her Norma," Simon said.

"I did. Balton is the guy who has the concession. She works for him."

"Where is Scoden Street?"

"About five-six blocks from here, on the left off of Geary."

"And what's her name?"

"I tolja, Norma," said the other, with obviously increasing impatience with so much stupidity.

"Nothing else?"

"You tell 'em Norma took the pitchers here," said the bartender. "They'll take care of ya."

"Thank you," said the Saint.

He finished his drink, put down the exact price and a minimum tip, and sauntered back to the lobby.

If the shapely Norma was not averse to providing certain extracurricular services of the type indicated by Mr. Fennick's story, it was highly implausible that the bartender would know nothing about it. Indeed, it was most probable that he would sometimes help to procure them. Therefore the Saint couldn't insist on getting in touch with her too urgently, or pressing the questioning too hard without the risk of telegraphing a warning to the quarry he had yet to identify.

Behind the reception desk, the night clerk, a weedy young man with long hair and acne, was toting up stacks of vouchers on an adding machine. He kept Simon waiting while he clicked his way stubbornly through to the end of a pile, and then looked up with an unctuous affectation of attentiveness.

"Yes, sir?"

"I'm afraid I left my key upstairs," said the Saint. "Can you let me have a spare? Room four-o-nine."

"What is the name, sir?"

"Templar."

The clerk ducked aside behind a screen that blocked one end of the counter, but he could be heard flipping the pages of an index. After some further groping in a drawer he bobbed back, holding a key.

"Could you show me anything with your name on it, sir?"

Simon impassively produced a driver's license, and the clerk handed over the key.

"Do you put everyone through this when they lock themselves out?" Simon inquired mildly.

"Yes, sir, if I don't know them. You can't be too careful, at this hour of the night, I always say. Especially during a convention."

"Why especially during a convention?"

"When they get too full of the spirit of the thing, sir, delegates often think of practical jokes to play on each other—all in good fun, of course, but not always appreciated by the victim. You yourself, sir, mightn't be amused if you found a live seal in your bathtub, and found out that my negligence had enabled your friends to plant it there."

"I guess you have a point."

The pimply one bared his yellow teeth ingratiatingly.

"I knew you'd see it, sir. Thank you. Goodnight, sir," he said, and picked up another sheaf of checks and resumed the busy tapping of his calculator keys without another upward glance.

Simon stepped into the elevator, and the lugubrious liftman let go a carpet sweeper which he was pushing lethargically about the foyer and started the ascent in stoic silence.

Finally the Saint asked: "Plenty of what?"

After another floor had gone by, it transpired that the driver had not lost the thread of his lucubrations.

"Things," he opined darkly.

They were at the fourth floor again. He held the gate open, without looking at the Saint, but with a rugged air of self-satisfaction with his achievements in both navigation and diplomacy. Simon got out, and headed back to his room.

His excursion had yielded nothing sensational, but at least he had half a name, an address which might be the start of a trail, and some observations which might interest Mr. Fennick.

The trouble was that Otis Q. Fennick was not there to hear about them.

The room was not big enough to hide even such a slight man as Mr. Fennick anywhere except in the closet or under the bed. But if he had been even more jittery than he had shamelessly confessed, it was remotely possible that he could be terrified of anyone who might enter.

"Otis, old marshmallow," said the Saint reassuringly. "It's only me—Templar."

There was no answer.

The bathroom door was ajar. Simon looked inside. Mr. Fennick was not there. Nor was he in the closet, or under the bed—Simon ultimately forced himself to verify both places, foolish

though it made him feel. But in about half the detective stories that the Saint had read, one of those locations could have been practically counted on to reveal Mr. Fennick's freshly perforated corpse. None of them did. It was almost disappointing.

Simon went to the dresser for the pack of cigarettes which he had left where he put down Mr. Fennick's business card. Now he found the card tucked half into the opening of the package, in such a way that he couldn't have extracted a cigarette without having his attention focused on it. On the back had been written, in a cramped but meticulous script:

> *I simply can't let you bother with my problems. I'll just have to pay up and make the best of it. Please forget the whole thing.*

Simon sat down on the bed and picked up the telephone.

"Mr. Fennick, please," he said.

"One moment, sir." It was the oleaginous voice of the night clerk, who was evidently entrusted with several chores by a thrifty management. Then: "I'm sorry, sir, but Mr. Fennick's line still has a Do Not Disturb on it."

"Since when?"

"He asked me to put it on when he came in, sir, at one-thirty."

"I see . . . Would you give me his room number?"

The pause this time was almost imperceptible.

"I'm afraid I couldn't take the responsibility for that, sir. He might be very annoyed if you disturbed him by knocking on his door."

"What makes you think I'd do that?"

"I'm sure you wouldn't want to, sir. So you won't mind asking the manager for the information, will you? He comes on at eight o'clock. Thank you, sir."

"Invite me to your funeral," said the Saint sweetly, but he said it after a clack in the receiver had announced that the clerk had already terminated the discussion.

For a few minutes, in a simmer of sheer exasperation, he contemplated some quite extravagant forms of retaliation against everyone who had contributed to wasting his time for the past hour. But at the end of a cigarette he laughed, and fell asleep thinking it was lucky he hadn't gone any farther on a wild-goose chase with such a protégé.

If Mr. Otis Q. Fennick was such an eviscerated marvel that he insisted on submitting to the crudest kind of contrived shakedown, without even a struggle, after having been offered the best advice and assistance, then he deserved to stew in his own syrup.

The Saint slumbered on this relaxing justification for precisely three hours and seventeen minutes, at which time a crew of civic

servants arrived under his window with some raspingly geared conveyance and began to decant into it the garbage cans which had previously been only silent ornaments of the alley, clanging and crashing them back and forth as a tympanic accompaniment to their mutual shouts of encouragement and impromptu snatches of vocalizing.

By the time they had moved on he was wide awake and knew that he had no hope of feeling drowsy again that morning. But as he lay still stretched out with his eyes closed, the entire Fennick episode unrolled again in his memory, and the earlier mood of exasperation crept back. Only instead of being a petulant flash of anger, it was now a considered and solid resentment that could not be dismissed.

He tried to dismiss it while he got up and showered and shaved and went down to the coffee shop for breakfast, but it refused to go away.

"You've got every excuse to duck this," he had to tell himself finally, "except one that'll let you forget it."

If Mr. Fennick consented to pay blackmail, it could well be maintained that that was Mr. Fennick's own private business, and the hell with him. But if a blackmailer got away with blackmail, that had always been the Saint's self-appointed business, as had any kind of unpunished evil. And it was doubly so when the circumstances ruled out any possibility of legal retribution.

Simon finished his second cup of coffee and went back through the lobby, where a totally different staff had taken over. This time he had no difficulty in getting Mr. Fennick's room number, which was 607; but the switchboard operator told him that the Do Not Disturb was still on the phone. For a moment he contemplated going up and banging on the door; but then he reflected that Mr. Fennick, in the shattered condition in which the sweetmeat sachem must have regained his room, had probably taken a sleeping pill and would not exactly scintillate if he were prematurely aroused.

Meanwhile, the Saint had in his pocket the card which the uncooperative bartender had given him. It might not be much, but it was something. And at least it might help to pass the time constructively.

Scoden Street was a narrow turning off one of the drabber stretches of Geary, given over to a few small dispirited neighborhood shops jumbled among other nondescript buildings of which some had been converted into the dingier type of offices and some still offered lodgings of dubious desirability. Number 685 seemed to combine the two latter types, for a window on the street level

was lettered with the words VERE BALTON STUDIOS on the glass, behind which an assortment of arty enlargements were attached to a velvety backdrop, while on the entrance door was tacked a large printed card with the legend APARTMENT FOR RENT.

The door was open, though only a couple of inches.

Simon pushed it with his toe and went in.

He found himself in a small dark hallway, at the rear of which a flight of worn wooden stairs started upwards, doubtless to the vacant apartment. Immediately on his right was a door, also ajar, with a shingle projecting from the lintel on which the VERE BALTON STUDIOS sign was repeated. He went through into a sort of reception room formed by the space between the shoulder-height backdrop of the front window and a set of full-length drapes which shut off the rest of the premises. It contained a shabby desk and three equally shabby chairs, but none of them was occupied.

"Hi," said the Saint, raising his voice. "Anybody home?"

There was no reply, or even any sound of movement. But the long drapes were not fully drawn, and through the aperture he could see a yellowness of artificial light.

He went to the opening and looked into a small studio equipped with a dais, a tripod camera, and the usual clutter of lamps, screens, and props to sit on or lean against. But nobody was utilizing the props, and the only lamp alight was a bare bulb hanging from the ceiling.

Simon stepped on through the curtains. The near corner inside had been partitioned off with beaverboard into a cubicle which from the sinks and racks and shelves of bottles that could be seen through its wide open door was obviously used as a darkroom; but no none was using it. At the opposite end of the studio was another door, half open.

"Anybody home?" Simon repeated.

Nobody acknowledged it.

He crossed the studio quietly, cutting a zigzag course between the paraphernalia, and his second tack put him at an angle from which he could see the body that lay on the floor of the back room.

It belonged to a fat man of medium height with dirty gray hair and a rather porcine face to which death had not added any dignity. There were three bullet holes in the front of his patchily reddened white shirt, loosely grouped around the VB monogram placed like a target over his heart, and two of them were ringed with the powder burn and stain of almost contact range.

Simon bent and touched the back of his hand to one of the flabby cheeks—not to verify the

fact of death, which was unnecessary, but to determine if it was very recent. The skin was cold.

The room was an office, furnished with an antique roll-top desk, a hardly less antique typewriter, and a bank of unmatched filing cabinets. Nude color-calendar photos were pinned up on much of the wall space, interspersed with glossy monochromes of similar esthetic subjects. The desk was littered with a hodgepodge of correspondence, bills, prints, and negatives; and about half the filing drawers were open to varying extents, many of them with folders partly raised out of them. Nevertheless the general impression, strengthened by the film of dust that could be observed on many surfaces, was not so much that of a recent ransacking as of an ancient and incurable disorder.

But why should there have been any ransacking? With his rolled-up sleeves and his coat over the back of a chair, Vere Balton hadn't surprised any intruder—he had been surprised. And with a gun in his chest, he would have been glad to produce whatever the intruder wanted in exchange for his life, hoping he would not be cheated . . .

All this went through the Saint's mind in a consecutive rush, like a cascade through a sieve. But before it had finished draining through, one scrap of flotsam was caught.

Mr. Otis Q. Fennick was entangled, consciously or not, with something bigger than a candid shot of himself in the hay with a buxom brunette whose name was not on his marriage license.

Simon backed out of the office on tiptoe, and retraced his steps even more circumspectly between the obstacles and over the coiling cables of the studio lights, being careful to leave no clumsy traces of his visit. But in the anteroom in front he stopped by the desk on which he had seen the telephone. That was the logical place to look for one item of information that he had come for, and he found it in the first drawer he opened with a handkerchief wrapped around his fingers. There was an address book, precisely where one would expect it to be kept, and he turned the pages with the same precaution against leaving fingerprints, scanning each one swiftly but completely.

He had to go nearly all the way through the book before he came to a Norma, and not much farther to be positive that there were no others. He turned back and memorized the entry with a second glance: *Norma Uplitz, 5 De Boer Lane—Apt 2, AG 2-9044.*

Not the most likely name for the sexily constructed siren that Mr. Fennick had indicated, but a lot of Hollywood queens had started life even less glamorously baptized.

He had not touched either of the entrance doors with his hands when he came in, he recalled, and he went out without touching them. He did pull the front door almost shut, before he put his handkerchief away, leaving it as nearly as possible in the same position as he had found it. Let the police have the benefit of any clues that might be latent in the set-up: The Saint's only concern was not to interpolate any new ones which might point misleadingly to himself.

The greatest risk seemed to be that someone might remember seeing him going in or coming out. That was a hazard which he shared with the real killer. But the ultimate danger to himself was much less, for if that hypothetical witness took any note of the time, it would prove that the Saint had been there several hours after the autopsy would show that Vere Balton had died. So he took his departure boldly and unhurriedly, making no special effort to avoid being observed—which was perhaps the best of all guarantees against being noticed.

He walked back to the Mercurio and took the elevator directly to the sixth floor, without wasting any time on the house phone. He did not have to hesitate over the route to Room 607, for the number told him that it must be next door to the same relative location as his own room.

There was no Do Not Disturb card hung on the door knob, but it would not have moderated his peremptory knock if there had been.

The door opened almost instantly; and for one of the few times in his life Simon Templar felt that only the sangfroid of a sphinx saved him from falling over backwards.

It was not Otis Q. Fennick who opened the door. It was a blonde. And no part of her configuration remotely resembled that of the creator of Crackpops.

It was, however, strikingly reminiscent of the general impression that Mr. Fennick had haltingly conveyed of his unauthorized cot companion. But one specification that Simon was unshakeably clear about was that Mr. Fennick's surprise package had been distinctly described as a brunette.

This blonde had not been manufactured in the past few hours. She might have owed something to tints and rinses, but the foundation was genetic. The Saint could tell. And as other minutiae gradually registered on him, they declined unanimously to fit into the reconstruction of a frill who hustled photos in a joint like the Rowdy Room and would blow more than a flash bulb for a fast bill. This one's dress had the unmistakable cachet of expensive exclusiveness, and any one of the small ornaments she wore would have outvalued Norma Up-

litz's whole treasure chest of jewels. This one might be available too, for the right proposition, but the price tag would be liable to sift the boys by their tax brackets.

"I beg your pardon," said the Saint, with a sensation of laboriously cranking his chin up off his necktie. "I was looking for Mr. Fennick."

"He isn't here."

"But this is his room?"

"Yes. He just happens to be out."

"Oh."

"It's perfectly respectable," said the blonde. "I'm his wife."

"His . . ."

"Wife. You must have heard the expression. Are you feeling all right? You look rather glassy-eyed."

Simon strove valiantly to unglaze. It required an abnormal effort, but the multiplication of shocks was proceeding a trifle rapidly even for him. And the day had scarcely begun.

"I was a bit startled," he admitted. "I understood you were in New York."

"I was—yesterday. But these new jets are so sudden. Do you have some business with him, or are you a friend?"

"To tell you the truth, I only met him last night. But we became quite chummy."

"I can imagine it. Do you sell candy, or is it soda pop?"

"Neither. We just happened to be at the same hotel, and we bumped into each other. One of those things."

"I thought you looked different from most of his business buddies. Come in."

Simon had intended to from the moment he saw her. The room was virtually a facsimile of his own, and the blonde looked as out of place in it as a piece of Cartier hardware in a junk yard. But the observation he wanted to make was that Mr. Fennick really wasn't there. The closet was open, and he was able to check under the bed by clumsily dropping the pack of cigarettes he slipped out of his pocket.

"As a matter of fact, you might be able to help me to catch up with him," said the blonde. "I only arrived late last night myself—it was all on the spur of the moment, and I didn't even try to call him till this morning. I know what these conventions are like. I spent the night with an old girl friend who lives here."

"I was wondering how you got in. That's why I looked so dazed when I saw you."

"They gave me a key at the desk, of course, as soon as I proved I was Mrs. Fennick. Why shouldn't they?"

"I called him less than an hour ago," said the Saint, "and his phone was still shut off."

"It was shut off when I called from downstairs ten minutes ago. So I came on up anyhow. Exercis-

ing a marital privilege. I didn't see why I should have to sit in the lobby till he condescended to regain consciousness. But no Otis."

"He must have gone out and forgotten to clear the line."

"Do you solve crossword puzzles, too?"

Simon had been opening his cigarette package, which was a fresh one, with unhurried neatness. He offered her the first of its contents, which she accepted.

"I can't solve any puzzle about where he may have gone," he said, striking a match. "He didn't tell me anything about his plans for the day."

"May I ask why you thought he wouldn't mind your waking him up, if he was trying to sleep late?"

"I happened to have dug up a hot lead on something he was telling me he was very concerned about financially. I thought he ought to know it at once, so I took a chance."

On the pretext of looking for a safe place to get rid of the match, he contrived to work himself around to a sufficient glimpse of the bathroom to confirm that Mr. Fennick was not hiding out there, or stashed there as a corpse. He was aware that he might begin to seem obsessed with such possibilities, but he could certainly have offered a doozy of an excuse.

"Well," she said, "that seems to leave us both in the same boat. He's probably lost for the day now. They have meetings and lunches and speeches and more meetings, from the first hangover till it's time to start the next one, don't they, on these convenions?"

"I wouldn't know," Simon grinned. "I've never been part of one."

"Ah, yes. I said that you didn't look like the type."

"Neither do you, Mrs. Fennick."

She had been studying him with unmistakably increasing interest for the last few minutes, and her appraising eyes did not waver by a fraction of a degree at the intangible hint of audacity in his tone.

She said: "Did you get chummy enough, as you put it, to call my husband Otis?"

"I guess I did."

"Then you needn't be so formal with me. If he didn't tell you, the name is Liane. Do you have a name too? Or a number?"

"Simon Templar."

"The Saint, of course. All right, I can enjoy a joke. But eventually you'll have to explain why it's funny. And what type don't I look like?"

"The wife of a marzipan magnate," said the Saint, unabashed. "You look more like a glamour model."

"I was, not so many centuries ago. Lots of magnates pick up that type. Didn't you know? It adds prestige, like a Cadillac. Why

don't we spend the day together, waiting for Otis, and I'll explain it all."

He would have had to be very much younger, very much older, or very much more naïve, to misunderstand the whole of her implication, and he let her know that he was weighing all of it in the long cool glance that he rested on her before he answered.

"It might be fun," he said, and he did not have to pretend to mean it. "But—"

"Don't tell me that Otis became your best friend overnight. And you don't look like a man who'd have any other objection to taking pity on a lady's boredom."

"He didn't, and I haven't. But I'd hate to help spoil a good thing for you."

"Did Otis give you the idea, in his cups, that we held hands every night while we made plans for our silver wedding honeymoon?"

"No. In fact, he gave me the impression that you were the rolling-pin type, just waiting for him to come home with a smudge of lipstick under his ear. If you've got him as housebroken as that, it could be moderately catastrophic if he picked up the ammunition to shoot back at you."

"My good man, since we've suddenly become so very businesslike, let me remind you that the Fennicks are legal residents of the sovereign State of New York, which is also the legal domicile of the Fennick Candy Company. Have you ever heard any betting on a rich man's chances in a New York divorce court?"

"You sound as if you'd talked to some good lawyers."

She came so close, deliberately, that the first time they both inhaled simultaneously would have caused a most stimulating collision.

"Then why don't you let me worry about my own problems?"

He bent and carefully kissed her motionlessly upturned mouth. Then he stepped back and glanced at his watch.

He was not aware until afterwards of how coldblooded he must have seemed. He didn't intend it as a rebuff. It was a long time since he had abjured any profound amazement at the strange impulses of women. Perhaps he had been exposed to too many of them. But in an oddly unegotistical way, for him, he was inclined to respect the privacy of their motives, and to enjoy the pleasant surprise without criticizing the donor. He had no moralistic resistance to Liane Fennick as an unexpected diversion, but there was a one-track quirk in his psychology that would not let him enjoy the best of it while he was still wound up with something else.

"There's another problem I've got to take care of," he said.

"Let's make it a date for lunch."

She was palpably baffled by his restraint, but he couldn't help that. If he could have seen only a few hours into the future, he might have played it differently. But she took it well.

"Twelve-thirty?"

"I'll pick you up here."

"This time you'd better use the phone first," she said. "If it doesn't answer, or if Otis happens to have come back, I'll meet you at the Drake."

"But now," said the Saint regretfully, "I have got to duck."

He brushed her lips once more, with impudent promise, and went out.

An ingrained pattern of cautiousness that had become second nature made him walk down two flights of stairs before taking the elevator. It was not a question of exaggerated apprehensiveness, but a simple automatism of eliminating unnecessary risks. Whatever the intrusion of Liane Fennick might lead to, he could lose nothing by impressing the elevator boy with the fact that he rode down from his own floor, which should suffice to supplant any recollection of the floor he had gone up to.

The same habit made him ask the bell captain in the lobby for a street map of the city, instead of asking the whereabouts of De Boer Lane. There was no point in gratuitously enlarging the number of witnesses who might recall that he had inquired about that address.

And having located that short blind alley on one of the southern slopes of Telegraph Hill, he also picked out a convenient intersection three blocks away, and directed a taxi there, for the same good reason. From the intersection, after the taxi was out of sight, he walked. There was nothing prescient about it, except a logic which assumed that something had to be rotten in the state of Fennick. He didn't exhaust himself with trying to guess what it was. But after a very short stroll, he knew that his instincts had been impeccable at least on the score of procedure.

His taxi couldn't have reached De Boer Lane if he had begged it to. The street that it opened from was almost solid with police cars at that point, and an ambulance backed into the narrow turning blocked it completely. The lane was only about 40 yards long, and was lined with small unmatched houses jammed shoulder to shoulder, none of them more than two stories high, the kind of cottages that lend themselves to cramped but quaint conversions and are therefore highly esteemed by would-be Bohemian types. It was the ideal backwater for a girl of Norma Uplitz's unconventional mores, where odd goings-on at odd hours would be so normal as to attract no attention. All except one aberration about which

even the most sophisticated neighborhoods are seldom blasé . . .

The inevitable crowd of passers-by who had flowed in from the street was giving the native colony plenty of competition for the best view of the shrouded shape which at that moment was being carried out on a stretcher from a house halfway up the cul-de-sac.

The Saint did not need any parapsychic gifts to anticipate what the number of the building would be before he located it. And as he edged inconspicuously closer, he did not really need his exceptional visual acuity to decipher the name of Norma Uplitz on one of the mail boxes at the entrance. As for the infinitely ultimate possibility that the body on the stretcher could have come from the other of the two apartments, he only had to keep his ears open as he filtered through the morbid mob with the nearest approximation he could make to invisibility.

It was an alabaster-faced woman with mauve lipstick and stringy hair who said to a fellow colonist, an elderly bearded man with a gold earring: "Of course I heard the shots, dahling. How could I help it, living right underneath her? But I haven't the faintest idea what time it was, except that it was daylight. I only half woke, and thought she was probably slamming doors or hitting a paramour with a frying pan or some ordinary thing like that. I've had the most frightful job trying to explain to some yokel detective that I couldn't leap out of bed and start investigating every time there was an uproar in Norma's apartment. I'd never have got a good night's sleep . . ."

Simon drifted on, melting out of the crowd as self-effacingly as he had joined it.

He walked, down past the limits of the old Barbary Coast of legendary times, now sanitized into something called an "International Settlement," on into the bustling exotically scented streets of Chinatown which looked much less exotic in the watery sunlight which was struggling to penetrate the dank mistiness of a fine San Francisco morning.

Johnny Kan was already at work in his back office, ploughing into the myriad unepicurean details of restaurant management of which his evening customers would be as unconscious as they would be of the activities of the cleaning crew which was just as busy restoring the dining rooms to the virginal freshness which they would thoroughly debauch before midnight. But he showed no impatience at being interrupted.

"You must have been cheating last night," he said, "or you couldn't look so much better than I feel. Can I do anything for you, or did you only come here to gloat?"

"You can do something for me," said the Saint. "I could do it myself if I had to, but I'm feeling lazy. I'm sure you've got all the connections. Just find out today's schedule for these caramel-cookers that we lost so much beauty sleep dodging last night."

"I must be an all-day sucker," Johnny Kan said, reaching for the phone. "But you had me convinced that it was just a coincidence that you hit San Francisco in the middle of their convention, and you didn't want any part of them."

"I wasn't trying to kid you. The important coincidences have all happened since we said goodnight."

The schedule was forthcoming in a few minutes.

"Ten o'clock, Paramount Theater: a movie, *New Methods of Merchandising,* followed by a lecture on *Taxation Aspects of the Bottling Industry.* Twelve o'clock, St. Francis Hotel, lunch: guest speaker, the President of the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce. Three o'clock, forum: *Soda Fountains and Juvenile Delinquency.* Five o'clock—"

"Whoa," said the Saint. "That's plenty. I only want to know where to look for a guy, and I should be able to find him long before five."

"Would it be very indiscreet to ask which of the caramel cookers has incurred this unprecedented interest?"

"No, I don't think so. The name is Otis Q. Fennick."

"Oh. Of the Fennick Candy Company?"

"Why—do you know him?"

"No. But I know their West Coast representative. A Mr. Smith. He eats here sometimes. They have a sales office here, you know."

"I didn't."

"When you want to know anything in a foreign city, you should always consult the natives. Let me look up the address for you. Right now, I should think that's where you'd be most likely to find him. They don't make any soft drinks, so he'd hardly be interested in the tax problems of bottling—if I may presume to offer my amateurish deductions." Kan turned the pages of a city phone book. "Ah, here it is. On Sutter Street—it should be only a block or two from Union Square."

He jotted down the address, and Simon took it gratefully.

"You're right, I'm glad I asked you."

"Doesn't that entitle me to know what this is about?"

"Perhaps, before I leave town, Johnny. But not just yet. There's still too much I haven't figured out myself."

Simon continued his walk, down to Union Square and west on Sutter. The number that Kan had given him was a modern office building, and the directory

board in the lobby showed that the Fennick Candy Company was on the second floor. He went up.

From the sequence of doors on the corridor, the West Coast office appeared to take up only two rooms, but they were doubtless sufficient for their purpose. The outer room which he entered had, besides the standard furniture, a large glass-case display of samples, and a middle-aged woman with an efficient but forbidding air who was typing rapidly at the dictation of some tinny disembodied voice that came through an earphone clamped to her head. Electrically recorded sounds entered her ears and emerged through her fingertips as transformed impulses to be electrically recorded in legible form: she was the only human link in this miracle of technology, and she seemed to bear a deep-rooted grudge against this incurable frailty of hers and to have dedicated herself to suppressing every trace of it that she could.

"Mr. Fennick is busy," she said, with a kind of malevolent satisfaction. "Can I help you?"

"I'm afraid not." Simon glanced at the communicating door. "Is he with somebody?"

"Mr. Fennick is working on a speech he has to make to the convention tomorrow. He gave the strictest orders that he was not to be disturbed for any reason whatever."

"This is very very important."

"For any reason whatever," the woman repeated smugly.

She was a type that Mrs. Fennick would have approved of thoroughly, according to Mr. Fennick's thumbnail sketch of his ever-loving spouse. It was as certain as anything humanly could be that she had not sat on anybody's lap since she was knee-high. The paradox that didn't fit at all was that the Liane Fennick whom Simon had met was so utterly unlike his mental picture of a tyrannically jealous wife. But in any puzzle, when all the paradoxes were straightened out, the solution was often absurdly easy.

He inquired patiently: "How long will Mr. Fennick be incommunicado?"

"Until five minutes to twelve, when he has to leave for a luncheon."

"Is he always so hard to see?"

"Mr. Fennick isn't here very often. And this is a very busy time."

"Is Mr. Smith just as busy?"

"Not as a rule. But at present he's covering a meeting for Mr. Fennick, since Mr. Fennick has to work on his speech. If you'll leave your name and tell me your business, I'll try to arrange an appointment for you."

"Thanks, gorgeous," said the Saint, with beatified earnestness. "I may take you up on that. But later."

He sauntered out.

The next door along the cor-

ridor, which displayed only the word PRIVATE under its number, could only be the private entrance to the inner office so zealously guarded by the misanthropic matron with the headset. Even so has many a citadel with intimidating moat and drawbridge had an unguarded postern gate.

Simon leaned an ear against the upper panel. He heard no resonance of rounded phrases in rehearsal, or even the mutter of tentative phrases being fed into a dictating device. Of course, the door might have been exceptionally soundproof, or Mr. Fennick might have been a purely cerebral worker. But Simon did not intend to be put off from seeing him, if he was there. It would be easy for the Saint to apologize for having come to the wrong door, which must have been inadvertently left unlocked.

He took from his wallet a wafer-slim implement which he kept there as routinely as another man might have kept a nail file. At this period he seldom needed it as often as twice a year, but he would not have been surprised to have used it twice already that day. And yet on this third possible occasion it finally proved that the Boy Scouts were right and preparedness would always pay off sometime. It slid back the spring lock with less fuss than its own key, and Simon walked in with all the disarming insouciance of the excuse that he had prepared.

He could have saved himself the histrionic warm-up, for there was no audience to be disarmed by it.

The office, except for the traditional appointments of such sancta, was empty.

Simon set the spring lock in the off position, as his story required it, closed the door, and conscientiously forced himself to make another of the definitive checks which seemed to be foisting themselves on him with irksome regularity. Mr. Fennick was not in the conveniently coffin-sized coat closet. He was not under or behind the desk. Unless he had been cremated like a moth on the quarter-smoked but cold cigar in the ashtray, or ingested by the mouthpiece of the recording machine which still purred electronically beside the desk, or sucked out through the air conditioner which effectively blockaded the window, he must simply have gone out. Whether his antipathetic amanuensis knew it or not.

The Saint thought that she couldn't know. If she had known, it would have been just as easy to say he was out, and should have given her the same orgasm of unhelpfulness.

The clock that formed the centerpiece of the onyx inkstand on the desk showed that it still

lacked more than twenty minutes of noon.

Simon sat down in one of the guest armchairs, lighted a cigarette, and thought a lot more. For a full two minutes.

Then the outer door opened with the click of a key, and Otis Q. Fennick came in.

After the first bounce of his entrance had ploughed to a soggy halt, as if he had bumped into an invisible wall of half-congealed treacle, the lordling of the lollipops looked almost exactly the same as he had when Simon pulled him off the hotel fire escape. That is, he wore the same clothes and the same expression of paralytic befuddlement. The only material difference was that on the former occasion he had been empty-handed, whereas at this moment he was awkwardly lugging under one arm a cardboard carton about the size of a case of Old Curio. This he very nearly dropped as he gaped at the Saint with the reproachful intensity of a gaffed goldfish.

What he said can be loosely reproduced as: "Wha—well—I mean—how—"

"Greetings again, Otis," said the Saint amiably. "I hope you'll forgive me waiting for you like this. Your devoted watchbitch (is that the correct feminine?) insisted that you were busy and wouldn't let me in, but I couldn't tell her why I was sure you wouldn't be too busy to see me. So I toddled around and came in this other door which was fortunately unlatched."

Mr. Fennick pushed the door shut, frowning at it.

"I could have sworn I—"

"It must've fooled you," Simon said calmly. "Locks will do that sometimes."

The candy caliph put down his box. It seemed to be moderately heavy, and gave a faint metallic rattle when it tipped.

"Perhaps I didn't check it too carefully," he said. "I only went to the men's room."

"Do you have to take your own pottie?" Simon inquired, gazing pointedly at the carton. "I thought this was quite a modern building."

Mr. Fennick also glanced at the box, but seemed to decide against pursuing that subject. He straightened his coat and tie and moved to his desk, pulling himself together with the same air of forced resolution as he might have brought to a difficult business situation.

"Well, now, since you're here," he said, "I hope you didn't think I was ungrateful last night. But the note I left you was intended to be my last word on the subject, Mr. Templar."

"That's what I thought," said the Saint. "But what you forgot was that it mightn't necessarily be mine."

"That is what I was afraid of. And that is why I hoped you

would be saintly enough to accept my refusal of your services in the spirit in which it was made."

"So you did recognize my name."

"After you'd left me in your room. I had nothing to do but keep on thinking, and it all fitted so well with what I've heard of your reputation. But it also meant that I couldn't afford to be mixed up with you."

"Do you mean because of *your* reputation, or your bank roll?"

"Frankly, because I didn't know how long I could count on your sympathy. If you went on to take an active interest in my problem, I thought, you'd be bound to want to meet my wife eventually, and then she might get you on her side, and I'd be worse off than before. You don't know her, you see, in the same way as I do."

Simon ran lean brown fingers through his dark hair in a vaguely weary gesture.

"As a psychologist, you're a terrific taffy puller," he said. "When I got nosey, it takes more than a polite note to cool me off. And you had me thoroughly intrigued with the plot against your marital honor. So right after breakfast I was baying on the scent you'd let me sniff last night. As a matter of fact, I've just come from the pad of your buxom bedmate, the flashbulb gal."

The other's mouth sagged open to about the same extent as his eyes.

"You saw her?"

"On her way to the morgue. Someone else had been there first, and shot her."

"Are you sure?"

"I didn't see the bullet holes, if that's what you mean. But I saw her carried out, and a neighbor said that's what she died of. However, before that I'd been to the studio of the guy she worked for, to get her address. I had to look it up for myself, in his book. I can vouch for him. Someone made so sure of not missing him that they singed his shirt."

Mr. Fennick was still staring rigidly.

"This is shocking!"

"Isn't it? . . . My theory, of course, is that this person went to see Balton for the same reason that I did—to get the gal's address. And also, perhaps, to get the negative of a certain picture. Was the photographer who snapped you in the Don Juan pose a fat fellow with a face like a rather lecherous pig?"

"I was dazed, and blinded by the light, as I told you," Mr. Fennick said carefully. "And the man's face was hidden by his camera. But I have a sort of impression that he was stout."

"I'm assuming that Balton was the guy. And since the gal was on his regular payroll, it would tie in. I also think that with a gun in his ribs he was persuaded to hand over the film, before he got mowed down anyhow."

"Why?"

"Because if he hadn't, there wouldn't've been any point in killing Norma. She was only worth killing if she'd become the only other person who could swear that there'd ever been such a photo. And with the photo gone, it won't help the police much to be told—as their laboratory boys probably will tell 'em—that the same gun did both jobs. They'll be stuck for a motive, not having the inside dope like us . . . But I saw how you reacted when I told you I'd come from Norma's apartment, before I ever said she'd been shot. And I've noticed that you haven't queried my use of her name and Balton's, althought last night you didn't seem to know either one."

Mr. Fennick, groping for some occupation for his hands, picked up the spoiled cigar from his ashtray and clamped it between his teeth with a practically unconscious automatism, made a grimace, but re-lighted it anyhow.

"After what I told you last night, Mr. Templar, you could make it look very bad for me."

"I could," said the Saint detachedly. "But my problem is that I somehow can't visualize you becoming a murderer just to get out of a phony blackmail jam."

"That's very kind of you."

"So I've been thinking about your wife, and a few things I've learned about her that you didn't tell me. For instance, that she has an old girl friend here, good enough to drop in and stay with. Was this friend's name Uplitz?"

"Oh, no. No. But she does have an old friend here, married to a very successful man in the chemical business."

"Which sounds as if your wife may have lived in San Francisco herself once."

"Yes, indeed. This is her home town."

"And she used to be a model."

"Yes."

"So she could have known Vere Balton professionally."

"I suppose it's possible."

"I have another hunch about her. I don't think your married life is exactly blissful. Not that you ever said it was. But I think she'd be happy to get rid of you—if she could only keep enough of the heavy sugar from those Crunchy Wunchies. And you know it, because you're no fool. For the same reason, I think you'd give her her freedom if she'd take a fair settlement. But she's too greedy, so you've been holding out. You could do that if you'd been a good husband and had never given her the usual grounds for divorce."

Mr. Fennick's thin mouth was grim and tight around his cigar.

"You're making a lot of personal assumptions, Mr. Templar."

"Let me make some more. You weren't worried about her jealous nature, as you led me to believe,

but about how much she could take you for if she had the goods on you. And when you recovered from that hit on the head, you figured she'd got 'em. Perhaps you put in a call to your home in New York and found that she'd flown out here yesterday, but without getting in touch with you. That would have cinched it. She could have identified herself as your wife so that even that supercilious young jerk on the desk last night would have given her a spare key to your room, which was all Balton and Norma needed. And you knew you couldn't buy them off, because with that evidence she could match any bid you made. She was all set to take you for everything you've got."

The Candy Company's president had his fingertips pressed to his temples and his thumbs on his cheeks, his hands lightly covering his eyes, in an attitude of intense concentration, and he took no advantage of the moment of silence that Simon offered him.

The Saint got up and walked over to the carton that the other had brought in, giving him time, and lifted the lid inquisitively. What he saw first was a mechanic's cap on top of a crumpled suit of coveralls, which made him suddenly and purposefully delve further. Underneath them he came to the source of the muffled clanking he had heard, a well-worn set of plumber's tools in an open carrier, on top of which was a cheap pair of tinted glasses.

"Well, this fills in a few more blanks," he murmured. "You could have bought the tools at any secondhand store, and the overalls and glasses anywhere, and they make a much better disguise than a false beard. Even if anyone noticed you, the description would never fit Otis Q. Fennick, the genius behind Jumbo Juicies. Even your colleagues on the convention probably wouldn't recognize you on a fast walk-through. And yet you'd only need a minute in a booth in any public john to change into it or out again. You're just loaded with wasted talent, dady-o. The only flaw is that you're still stuck with Liane, who could still give the cops that missing motive. One thing leads to another, as the actress tried to warn the bishop when he helped her off with her galoshes."

Mr. Fennick sat perfectly still, so that for a second or two Simon seriously wondered whether the accumulated shocks and strains could have been too much for a weak heart.

Then the communicating door burst open, and the surly duenna of the outer office burst in.

For an instant the sheer outraged astonishment of seeing the Saint standing by the desk made her falter in her tracks and almost choked off the words that were piled up to burst from her mouth;

but the pressure behind them was too strong.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Fennick, but I knew you'd want me to disobey you about this. The hotel called. It's about Mrs. Fennick. They were trying to locate you through the convention, and finally they got Mr. Smith at the lecture, and he told them you were here. I must warn you, it's something awful—"

"What is it?" Fennick asked.

"She fell out of the window, Mr. Fennick. Or she jumped. They seem to think it was suicide!"

"Good God," Fennick said huskily.

Simon stepped forward, between him and his secretary.

"I'll go with him," he said. "You'd better get ready to cope with the reporters. They'll be calling up and flocking around like vultures in no time. But I know you can handle them."

Without actually touching her, he moved her firmly back to the outer office again by the force of increasing proximity alone, and in default of any supporting intervention by her employer she was helpless. The Saint returned her last venomous glare with a winning smile and closed the door on her.

Then he turned back to Fennick and lighted another cigarette.

"I guess I underrated you," he murmured. "You didn't forget about Liane. I suppose she phoned you to gloat over what she thought she'd got and ask if you were ready to talk business again, and you said you'd be right over. The Mercurio is only about three blocks from here, I think, and you could count on that dragon you keep outside to prevent anyone upsetting your alibi. If you had to tap Liane on the head with a wrench to make her easy to push out, the mark wouldn't be noticed after she'd hit the ground, any more than you'd be noticed scooting back down the stairs in your plumber's outfit. You'd reduced all the risks to a minimum, which is the best anyone can do. It was just plain bad luck about me."

The manufacturer moved stiffly around the desk, white-faced but with a certain dignity.

"I'll give myself up," he said. "You needn't come to see that I don't run away."

Simon shook his head reproachfully.

"You're wrong about me again, Otis, old jujube. I think capital punishment is a fine cure for blackmailers. Vere Balton and Norma Uplitz aren't any loss to the community. And that makes your late wife even guiltier than they were. If you can get away with it, good luck to you. The cops won't get any hints from me. I'm only coming along to check out of that crummy hotel and be on my way."

kiss of kandahar

by . . . Lawrence G. Blochman

Was it accidental drowning, as the coroner called it,— or had she been murdered? If so — who had killed her?

THE woman in Suite 232 of the Southside Apartment Hotel was certainly young, probably under twenty-five. She was tall and blond and, if not breathtaking, at least striking in appearance. Although she had lived at the Southside only ten days, both day and night clerks remembered the exact color of her eyes, the fact that she was always well-dressed, and the names and descriptions of the three persons who had visited her after her arrival. They also suspected that she was well-built, a suspicion that was confirmed by the night clerk who found her lying in her bathtub, dead.

The woman in Suite 232 was registered at the Southside as Belinda Ford Holliday. The night clerk who found her dead in her tub had been trying to raise her for an hour on the house phone to announce the arrival of a telegram. He knew she had not gone out, and when she failed to respond to the bellhop's repeated knocking, the night clerk had let himself in with a passkey. As a radio was playing in the bathroom, the clerk investi-

One of the reasons for the success of Lawrence G. Blochman's Dan Coffee stories is the authenticity of the medical background. Dr. Coffee isn't just labelled a pathologist—you are at his side as he works. It is this attention to minute detail which has, to quote David C. Cooke, made Blochman "one of the most popular tellers of pure stories of detection."

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gated, took one good look, gasped, and immediately called the police.

The Northbank Police Department arrived in three successive waves. The shock troops came within a few minutes with the sirens of the prowl cars screaming bloody murder. The squad cars drove up with a low growl of authority. The two carloads of technical men deployed in comparative silence, followed by the solitary, slow-gaited dignity of the final link in the chain of command: Lieutenant of Detectives Ritter.

Slim, dark, sad-eyed Lieutenant Max Ritter made his way to Suite 232 without a word. When he entered the bathroom, and instinctively took off his soft felt hat, his big ears gave him the silhouette of a pogo stick. He looked at the body in the tub and noted the pungent, sweetish aroma that permeated the white-tiled brilliance of the bathroom. He observed that the peach-colored silk lingerie, neatly folded beside the portable radio on the clothes hamper, was hand-embroidered. He also saw that an ash tray on the flat rim of the bathtub contained three cigarette stubs smoked to within half an inch of the straw tips. On the cerise bath mat, a mystery novel lay face down on its opened pages.

Ritter took another look at the late Belinda Ford Holliday. His long nose wrinkled as he sniffed pensively at the scented atmosphere. Then, as required by law, he telephoned the coroner. However, since the coroner was prone to regard all unexplained deaths as due to heart failure, apoplexy or accident — unless, of course, the head was missing or a knife protruded from the back—Ritter also telephoned his friend Dr. Daniel Webster Coffee, pathologist at Northbank's Pasteur Hospital, who had a great and useful scientific curiosity. . . .

Dr. Coffee was dining on a sandwich in his laboratory when Max Ritter phoned. An emergency operation was in progress and the surgeon had asked for a biopsy. It was an hour before Dr. Coffee had made a frozen section of the tissue from the operating room, and given his microscopic diagnosis. Then he went to join Ritter at the Southside Apartment Hotel.

"The coroner just left, Doc," Ritter said, as the tall, sandy-haired pathologist walked into Suite 232.

"Then you won't need me after all," Dr. Coffee said.

The detective blew an irreverent bubble of sound through his lips. "You know the coroner better than that, Doc." he said. "In an election year, the coroner's got no time for autopsies or inquests. So he says this is a case of accidental drowning. He thinks the bath was too hot or the gal

got in too soon after eating. He says she fainted, got her face under water and drowned. Only there wasn't any water in the tub when I found her."

"Her hair's wet," the pathologist said. "She could have kicked the plug out after she was unconscious, by a reflex action in a completely automatic struggle to survive."

"That's what the coroner says." The detective pursed his lips skeptically. "He also says that funny color in her face is a sign of drowning. Cyanosis, he says. I tell him I got it on good authority that cyanosis can also come from cyanide poisoning, and that cyanide smells like bitter almonds. Did you catch a whiff of that almond smell when you came in, Doc?"

Dr. Coffee nodded. The fragrant ghost of bitter almonds still haunted the room.

"But the coroner says the smell comes from the almond bath oil the dame's been using," the detective continued. "That's the bottle on that glass shelf, there. You can touch it, Doc. The boys dusted it and there's no prints on it."

Dr. Coffee picked up a bottle labeled: Kiss of Kandahar—Almond-scented Aromatic Bath Oil. There was a small amount of oily yellow liquid at the bottom of the bottle. Dr. Coffee withdrew the cork and raised it cautiously to his nostrils. The fragrance matched the scent of almonds which clung to the air. The pathologist again examined the dead woman's face.

"I don't think it was cyanide, Max," he said. "The lividity of the face isn't the right color. It's not right for drowning either. It's brownish gray, rather than a purple shade. Of course I can't be sure of anything without an autopsy. Is the coroner going to do a post-mortem?"

"He is not," Ritter said. "But he authorizes me to hire you to do one if I find suspicious circumstances. And that's what I find, all right."

"What are they, Max?"

"Well, this Belinda dame is divorced in Florida just a few weeks ago. I find the divorce papers in the other room. Her ex-husband is a guy named Warren Holliday from Boone Point—a jobber in spices and stuff he sells to the food canneries around here. Seems like Belinda had a date with him tonight, and he stood her up. Or he wants us to believe he stood her up. Just before the body was found, this telegram came for Belinda."

Ritter produced a yellow telegraph blank from his pocket and read aloud: " 'Sorry can't see you tonight but will try to make it tomorrow. Love. Warren.' The wire was filed at Boone Point late this afternoon. I just had the local police chief on the phone, and he can't locate Warren Holliday anywhere in Boone Point. So

maybe Belinda's ex did come to Northbank after all; maybe he sent this wire to build himself a little alibi in advance. Maybe—what's up, Brody?"

The plain-clothes man in the doorway said, "There's a bird outside, Lieutenant, says he has a date with Mrs. Holliday. Want to see him?"

Ritter winked knowingly and motioned to Dr. Coffee with his head.

"Sure, Brody. I'll see him." Ritter took Dr. Coffee's arm and closed the bathroom door behind them.

Brody ushered in a slim, homespun young man who appeared to be still in his twenties, and wasn't quite at home in the alert, executive manner he was wearing. He wore an obviously expensive suit, but wore it rather uneasily. Somehow his big muscular arms seemed to call for blue denims; and his hands should have held precision tools instead of the green wax-paper cornucopia of flowers they were carrying awkwardly.

"Are you Warren Holliday?" Ritter asked.

"No." The young man smiled nervously. "My name is Roy Manson. Isn't Mrs. Holliday here? I thought—"

"Sit down, Manson," Ritter said. "You live in Northbank?"

"Yes." Manson remained standing. "I'm general manager of the Bosworth Shoe Factory."

Of course, Dr. Coffee thought. General manager. Country boy makes good on big job. The good old American phenomenon: the self-made man—the quick rise from the production line to the front office.

"Are you in love with Belinda Holliday?" Ritter asked bluntly.

"Oh, no." Manson's smile was patient. "Belinda and I are very old friends. We went to school together in Missouri as kids. But I'm engaged to marry Esther Bosworth."

"The boss's daughter?" Ritter asked.

"Esther owns the factory now. Mr. Bosworth died six months ago. Would you please tell me what's happened to Belinda? I know something is wrong. I saw all those police cars downstairs, and—"

"She's dead," Ritter declared.

Manson sat down clumsily. He stared at Ritter with stunned eyes. "I was afraid of something like this," he said numbly.

"The coroner says it was an accident," Ritter said. "Tell me about your date with Belinda tonight."

"I'd invited Belinda to have dinner with me and my fiancée tonight," Manson said. "Esther has been visiting relatives in California, but I'd expected her back. Then she decided to stay on the Coast a few days longer, so this morning I called Belinda to tell her the dinner was postponed.

"Belinda sounded awfully blue on the phone. I'd noticed she'd been pretty dejected since she came back from the South, and it worried me. I've always been fond of Belinda. She's been terribly nice to me. When I first came to Northbank, when I was just a kid factory hand, not even a foreman then — why, Belinda used to invite me over to Boone Point for Sunday dinner and things. She'd just been married to a man with quite a bit of money, but she didn't try to snoot me. So when I saw how blue she was feeling, I thought I'd come over tonight anyhow, to try to cheer her up."

"What was she blue about?" Ritter asked.

"I can only guess." Manson shook his head. "I think the man she was going to marry may have walked out on her after she got her divorce. But that's only a guess."

"What was the man's name?"

"I don't know. She wouldn't tell me. He was married, too, and was supposed to get a divorce himself. So maybe—"

"Okay, go on home," Ritter said. "I'll call you tomorrow if I want you."

"I'd better be getting home myself, Max," Dr. Coffee said, "before my wife locks me out. I'll do the autopsy in the morning."

Roy Manson started for the door, hesitated, came back and placed the bouquet of flowers on a table.

"I'd like to leave these," he said. . . .

It seemed to Dan Coffee that he had just fallen asleep when he was awakened by his wife pinching his shoulder.

"Dan, wake up. The doorbell's been ringing for the past five minutes. There's a woman at the door."

Dan Coffee rolled out of bed and groped for his dressing gown. He stumbled sleepily down the stairs. He opened the door and his visitor stepped into the living room.

"I apologize for waking you in the middle of the night, Doctor," she said hurriedly. "But it's terribly important. It's about Belinda Holliday."

Dan Coffee blinked. The name did not register at first.

"Oh, yes," he said, after the third blink. "That's the woman at the Southside. Why do you come to me?"

Dr. Coffee was beginning to wake up. He looked curiously at his visitor. She was a dark, demure little woman, past the first bloom of youth but attractive in a virginal, wholesome way. At second glance he decided she would be attractive in many ways if she gave a little thought to the art of adornment. It was not the lack of make-up, for her skin was a healthy, golden tint. Her hairdo

was wrong—much too prim to go with her flashing black eyes. Her eyes were alive, positive, passionate.

"I was listening to the midnight news on the radio," the woman said. "I heard that Belinda had been found dead and that you were going to perform an autopsy. Was Belinda murdered, Doctor?"

"I can't say at this point," Dr. Coffee replied. "Are you related to Belinda Holliday?"

"I'm sorry. I didn't introduce myself. I'm Anne Devoto, Warren Holliday's secretary. The radio said the police are looking for Mr. Holliday."

"Yes. I understand he has disappeared."

"He hasn't disappeared. He—he's outside in my car."

So that's it, Dr. Coffee thought. *The secretary's in love with her boss. She's hiding him because she's afraid he killed Belinda.*

"Did Mr. Holliday kill his ex-wife?" Dan Coffee asked.

"He should have killed her years ago," said Anne Devoto with surprising fervor. "But he didn't."

"Then why doesn't he go to the police?"

"It's a strange story," Miss Devoto replied. "He's afraid nobody will believe it. We've read about you in the papers—"

There was a pause. *They think I'm a pushover for a likely story,* Dan Coffee mused. *Well, maybe I am. Still . . .*

"Bring Mr. Holliday in," he said.

Warren Holliday was a shaggy, gray-haired man in his late forties. He had tired gray eyes and a hesitant smile. His walk was slow and lumbering, but his handclasp was firm. He sat down wearily at Dr. Coffee's invitation.

"Did you see your ex-wife today?" the pathologist asked.

"No," Holliday answered. "I had a tentative date with her, but something came up and I postponed it."

"But you came to Northbank anyhow?"

Holliday's lips moved silently for a few seconds before he said, "Yes. How did you know?"

"Pure conjecture," Dr. Coffee said. "Why did you cancel your date?"

"Because of a business appointment. I'm a broker—deal in spices and seasonings. Late this afternoon I got a call from a spice importer from New Orleans who said he was in Northbank and wanted to see me. I had no idea how long my meeting would last, so I wired Belinda, calling off our date. Then I drove over from Boone Point to meet my New Orleans man in the lobby of the Northbank Hotel, as he suggested. I waited for more than an hour, but he didn't show up. I tried to call Miss Devoto in Boone Point, thinking perhaps he

had changed his plans and tried to reach me, but I couldn't make contact with my secretary. So I got back into my car and started home for Boone Point. Then I—I had an accident."

"You see, Mr. Holliday suffers from periodic migraine headaches," his secretary explained quickly. "Often his headaches are preceded by periods during which he loses track of time. That's possible, isn't it?"

Yes, it's possible, Dr. Coffee thought. Migraine is sometimes preceded by a lapse of memory. But it was interesting that Holliday's migraine should begin at about the same hour as his ex-wife's death.

"What is the last thing you remember, Mr. Holliday?" Dr. Coffee asked.

"Well, I remember vaguely running off the road, as it winds over the hill just this side of Boone Point. I remember trees—or a tree. Then I drew a blank."

"Are your headaches hemicranial?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"Migraine usually affects only one side of the head. Do you feel the pain behind one eye, or at the back of one side of your head, usually?"

"Behind the left eye, always."

"Do you mind?" Dr. Coffee said.

He pressed his thumbs gently against Holliday's eyeballs. His fingers explored the top and base of his skull. Holliday did not flinch. *He's lying,* Dr. Coffee thought. *If he had those prodromal signs when he said he did, he would be in excruciating pain now.*

"Where did you find him, Miss Devoto?" Dr. Coffee asked.

"He wandered into my apartment," Miss Devoto replied. "He was in a daze and shaking all over. I guess he walked from wherever he wrecked his car. I made him lie down and wrapped him in a blanket. I fixed him a hot drink and he slept for a little while. Then I heard the midnight news on the radio."

"Why did you and your wife break up, Mr. Holliday?"

"It was inevitable, I'm more than twenty years older than Belinda. I knew when I married her, nearly five years ago, that sooner or later she would fall in love with someone her own age."

"And she did?"

"Yes."

"Belinda never really loved Mr. Holliday," Anne Devoto said. Her eyes did not leave Warren Holliday's face.

"Did Mrs. Holliday get a divorce to marry a man named Roy Manson?" Dr. Coffee asked.

"Oh, no." Holliday smiled sadly. "Manson is an old friend of Belinda's. I believe he's engaged to marry someone else."

Then who was the man Belinda was going to marry? Holliday didn't know. Belinda had

never told him, and he had never asked. She had told him she wanted her freedom and that was enough.

The purpose of his broken date with Belinda that evening? Holliday didn't know, really . . .

"Nonsense!" Miss Devoto volunteered. "Mr. Holliday is much too gallant. He knows perfectly well what Belinda wanted. She's been calling him up practically every day this past week. I think something went wrong with her romance and she hoped to get Mr. Holliday to take her back. She would have tricked him into it—if she'd lived."

Dr. Coffee lighted a cigarette. As he smoked in silence, he reflected on the fact that both Holliday and Manson had seemed to have dates with Belinda on the same night. True, Manson said he had phoned in the morning to cancel his. That would have given Belinda time to try to get Holliday to come over. After a moment, the pathologist said, "Mr. Holliday, I think you had better tell your story to the police."

Miss Devoto's black eyes narrowed and her back stiffened visibly. "Do you believe that Mr. Holliday had anything to do with his ex-wife's death?"

"Why, no," Dr. Coffee said. "But if your story is true, and if, as the coroner believes, Mrs. Holliday's death was accidental, you will do well to get through the unpleasantness of a routine investigation as quickly as you can."

"I believe the doctor is right, Anne," Holliday said.

Dr. Coffee went to the telephone to call Max Ritter.

When he returned to his laboratory at Pasteur Hospital shortly before noon, Dr. Coffee was carrying three small flasks of brownish liquid and a Mason jar containing specimens of tissue in Formalin. He gave the Mason jar to his technician with the remark: "The usual sections, Doris."

He placed the three flasks on his desk, took off his hat and coat, and called, "Dr. Mookerji."

Dr. Motilal Mookerji, Pasteur's resident pathologist, materialized from somewhere behind the freezing microtome and set his course for Dr. Coffee's desk. Navigation was no simple problem for Calcutta's gift to Northbank. Not only was the little Hindu broad of beam, but his fore-and-aft dimensions precluded sideslipping through the narrow channels that separated the autoclave, centrifuge and other pieces of standing gear which cluttered the laboratory.

"Greetings, Doctor Sahib," he said. "Five times greetings. You have no doubt concluded a pleasant autopsy?"

"Concluded?" echoed Dr. Coffee. "We've barely started. Have

you ever run a Gettler test for drowning?"

The Hindu resident said, "Am familiar with hypothesis of Gettler test, although have never performed same on submerged cadavers. Are not samples of blood from right and left heart analyzed separately for chloride level?"

"Exactly," said Dr. Coffee. "Normally the salt content of the blood is the same on both sides of the heart. However, if the person died of drowning, the lungs would take in water which would dilute the blood in the left heart. Therefore, if the salt content of the blood is higher in the right heart than the left, the person was drowned—in fresh water."

"Am observing surplus blood sample," Dr. Mookerji said. "Am also remarking that blood exhibits brownish tint somewhat resembling hot chocolate. What is purpose of third sample, Doctor Sahib?"

"We'll try to identify methemoglobin with the spectroscope," Dan Coffee said. "The color is characteristic."

"Quite," the Hindu agreed. "Have observed similar color in native Bengal, in victims of blackwater fever."

"We don't have much blackwater fever in Northbank, but we do see an occasional case of potassium chlorate poisoning, which does the same thing to the blood. I've another rather delicate task for you, Doctor — a qualitative analysis from less than a thimbleful of liquid." Dr. Coffee carefully unwrapped a bottle which he gingerly passed to his Hindu assistant.

"Ha! Kiss of Kandahar!" exclaimed Dr. Mookerji, reading the label. "Kandahar is quite famous place in India, although currently in Afghanistan. You are no doubt familiar with frolics of Great Alexander among almond groves of Kandahar. Or perhaps verses by lady poetess Laurence Hope regarding almond blooms of—"

"Never mind the almond blooms," Dan Coffee said. "Just handle that bottle carefully. It may be deadly. And start with the assumption that you're looking for an aromatic benzene compound." . . .

When Lieutenant Max Ritter dropped in that afternoon, Dr. Coffee's laboratory was redolent with reagents, standard solutions and general toxicological activity.

"Is it murder, Doc?" the detective asked, as he parked one thigh on the edge of the pathologist's desk. "I can't hold my material witnesses much longer. They all got shysters waving lawbooks at me, yelling, 'Witness to what?' Do I book 'em, Doc?"

"I can't exclude drowning until tomorrow, Max," Dr. Coffee said. "The blood has to stand with picric acid overnight. And

our toxicology tests won't be finished much before then."

"I think it's murder," Ritter declared. "That Devoto dame, first of all, is lying her head off. She says she never saw the inside of Suite 232, but I find her prints all over the place. So I bring in the night clerk of the Southside and he identifies her as a dame who went up in the elevator about half an hour before the telegram came for Belinda, and came back down five minutes later. So the Devoto dame changes her story.

"She says a New York phone call came for Holliday in Boone Point, and it had to be answered right away because it involved a big deal in white pepper. She didn't know Holliday had sent the wire, so she thinks she'll find him with Belinda. The door to Belinda's apartment is open so she walks in, she says, and finds Belinda dead. So naturally she didn't want to talk about her visit."

"She's protecting Holliday, Max," Dr. Coffee said. "I think if we find that Belinda was murdered, and that Holliday may have killed her, Anne Devoto will confess that she did it herself. Why else would she leave her fingerprints in the apartment?"

"Could be," Ritter said. "She's been Holliday's secretary for fifteen years, and I guess she's been in love with him for fourteen. But Holliday is lying, too. That blackout story of his is phony. I found his car, all right, against a tree about a quarter mile this side of Boone Point. But it was going about three miles an hour when it hit the tree. There's just a little dent in one fender. And it backs right away when we get in and step on the starter.

"So I start looking for this spice importer. No trace of him. He's not in Northbank, not in Boone Point. So I call New Orleans. His home don't answer. His office ain't seen him in two days. Then I bring that night clerk from the Southside down to the station again and let him look at Holliday. 'That guy,' the clerk says, 'came into the lobby just before Miss Devoto stepped out of the elevator, coming down. I recall she grabbed his arm and they went out together.' So maybe she murdered Belinda to keep Holliday from taking her back, and talked him into inventing these cockeyed stories to protect *her*."

"*If* Belinda was murdered," Dr. Coffee said. "What about Manson?"

"I been holding him, too, while we checked his movements," the detective said, "but I can't keep him much longer. All his stories tally. He's going to marry that Bosworth babe who owns the shoe factory, all right. And she's out in California visiting relatives, like he says."

"And the young man Belinda was in love with?"

"Holliday and Manson back each other up on that one," Ritter replied. "They both think he was walking out on Belinda, and they both seem to think he was married, but nobody knows his name."

"Is the spice importer from New Orleans married, Max?"

"He is. And I'm still trying to find him," the detective said. "Flash me when you know something, Doc."

Next morning at ten o'clock Dr. Coffee flashed Lieutenant Ritter. "It's murder, Max," he said into the telephone. "Belinda wasn't drowned. She was poisoned—by someone who knew her intimate habits. . . . No, it wasn't cyanide. I'll tell you all about it later. Can you bring all your suspects up here late this afternoon, after I've finished my hospital routine? About five o'clock. . . . Sure, bring the spice importer, too, if you find him. Meanwhile, don't book anybody and don't mention the word murder.

"Another thing, Max. Since practically everybody in this case has been making free with the truth, I'd like you to do a little second-degree fibbing yourself. First, that bath-oil bottle is still in the apartment, so far as you know. Second, you're positively going to be out of town tonight. You have to leave in a hurry right after our conference. Okay, Max. See you at five."

Ritter had not turned up his spice importer by five o'clock, but he appeared at Dr. Coffee's laboratory with Warren Holliday, Roy Manson and Anne Devoto. The two men had undergone marked transformation during their brief police custody. Holliday had aged ten years. His gray eyes were no longer just tired; they were frightened. And Manson had shed not only his acquired executive manner, but his homespun shyness as well. He was edgy, harassed with a badgered, almost haunted look. Only Miss Devoto was her own calm self, demure and maidenly despite her vital, dark eyes.

"You no doubt know," Dr. Coffee began, "that Lieutenant Ritter suspected foul play in the death of Mrs. Holliday. I'll put your minds at ease by telling you at once that we have found no evidence of murder. We did find methemoglobin, a pathological factor produced in the blood by some diseases and certain poisons. Does any one of you know if Mrs. Holliday had had a recent attack of—say malaria?"

Nobody remembered any serious illness.

"Then there is the possibility of anaphylaxis—a fatal allergy," the pathologist continued. "She may have been hypersensitive to some drug or cosmetic product. Mr. Holliday, did your ex-wife

habitually use any particular brand of bath oil?"

"Belinda was crazy about anything that had the scent of almonds," Holliday said. "Her favorite was something called Kiss of Kandahar. She used it for years."

Dr. Coffee turned to Ritter. "Max, are any of your men still on duty at the Southside?"

"Nope," the detective said. "I pulled Brody off at noon today."

"When you get a chance, I wish you'd go back to Mrs. Holliday's apartment and get me that bottle of bath oil I noticed the other day. It was empty, but I may be able to squeeze out a drop or two and make an analysis."

"Is tomorrow okay?" Ritter asked. "I won't be in town tonight. I got to leave in half an hour for a quick trip upstate."

"Tomorrow's fine," Dr. Coffee said. "There's no hurry. Meanwhile you'd better release these good people. There seems no valid reason for holding them further."

Warren Holliday rose from his chair. The mask of fear slipped from his face as he turned to Miss Devoto, seeking confirmation. She smiled, and he smiled back at her, wonderingly, as though seeing her for the first time. "You mean we can go?"

"If the doc says you can go, you better hightail it out of here quick," Ritter said, "with the thanks and apologies of the police department and three bucks a day material-witness fees."

The trio had hardly left the laboratory when Max Ritter said, "I guess we can cut the double-talk now, Doc. Do you and the swami here know what was in that bottle?"

"Quite," Dr. Mookerji replied. "Analyzed contents with own hands. Same contained mononitrobenzene, alias oil of mirbane, which is noisome photoplasmic poison of high-octane potency."

"Then why do we let these characters go, Doc?"

"Because if one of those three killed Belinda, the guilty person knows there was mononitrobenzene in the bath-oil bottle, and that I may be able to identify the poison if I can get my hands on it. Therefore I am convinced that the murderer will sneak back to Belinda's apartment tonight to get the bottle. You and I will be waiting there."

"Okay, Doc. Let's go, then. Swami, take any messages that come here for me."

En route to the Southside Apartment Hotel, Ritter said, "Tell me more about this oil of whoosis, Doc."

"Mononitrobenzene," Dr. Coffee said, "is called oil of mirbane in commerce. It used to serve as artificial bitter-almond flavoring in the days before federal food-and-drug laws. It's still used in small and safe amounts in per-

fumery, among other things. In large amounts, it can decompose the blood and act on the central nervous system. It can be absorbed through the skin, causing death — sometimes within the hour—by paralyzing the respiratory centers.

"Belinda's habit of reading and smoking in the bathtub would allow plenty of time for absorption of the pleasant-smelling poison. Therefore the murderer was well acquainted with her intimate habits."

"Like that spice importer I can't locate," Ritter said.

"Or any of the three persons you've just released. I think I know which one it is—for reasons you'll understand, if I'm right."

Ritter parked his car behind the Southside. The two men entered through the basement and walked to the second floor by the fire stairs. Ritter opened Suite 232 with a passkey.

They had been sitting in the dark for more than an hour when there was a knock at the door, followed by a violent, persistent ringing of the bell. "This upsets my theory," Dr. Coffee whispered.

"I'll upset that Swiss bell ringer," Ritter growled. He flung open the door. "The swami! Get inside here quick! What's the idea of—"

"Have no fears, Leftenant," Dr. Mookerji said. The door closed again and he continued talking in the dark. "Took every precaution to conceal present destination, making surreptitious entrance via devious routes. However, two telegraphic messages arrived for you from police station, Leftenant, so decided to deliver same in person to maintain secrecy of current whereabouts."

Paper crackled as the Hindu pressed something into the detective's hand. Ritter shoved two envelopes into his pocket. "I'll read 'em later," he said. "No lights, now."

A series of thumps, followed by suppressed exclamations marked the progress of the Hindu in the darkness. The creak of sofa springs and a sigh announced the success of his search for a seat.

Another hour passed in silence before Dr. Coffee heard the sound he had been waiting for: the scrape of a key in a lock.

The door opened slowly. The narrow ribbon of light widened into a pale oblong silhouetting briefly a human figure which disappeared instantly as the door clicked shut. Dan Coffee held his breath. So apparently did Ritter and Dr. Mookerji. Only the breathing of the newcomer was audible.

A flashlight beam speared the gloom, and a luminous disk rippled across the rug. Then Max Ritter touched the switch and the

living room was flooded with brightness.

"Hello, Mr. Manson," Dr. Coffee said. "I've been expecting you."

Roy Manson stood in the center of the room, blinking at the gun in Ritter's hand.

"I thought you'd have a key," Dr. Coffee continued, "to be able to substitute mononitrobenzene for Belinda's bath oil during her absence. And a man familiar with Belinda's intimate bathing habits *would* have a key. You were Belinda's lover, weren't you, Manson, for some time before she went South for a divorce?"

Manson turned on a frozen white smile. "We were just old friends," he said.

"Such close friends," Dr. Coffee said, "that Belinda got rid of her husband and came to Northbank to be near you—the man she expected to marry. But she wasn't going to sit by quietly, was she, just because you changed your mind while she was away and decided to marry the shoe heiress instead? When does your fiancée, Miss Bosworth, get back from California, Manson?"

Manson did not reply.

"Answer to said conundrum now reposing in Leftenant Ritter's pocket, perhaps," Dr. Mookerji volunteered.

"That's right. I wired the police chief at Beverly Hills today." Ritter fished the crumpled yellow envelopes from his pocket. He chuckled grimly as he tore them open. "Esther Bosworth is due back in Northbank tomorrow by air. So I guess Belinda got killed because she was going to spill her story to Miss Bosworth —about how she got a divorce to marry her lover, and how Manson was going to ditch her to marry a shoe factory instead."

"It was the shoe factory that first made me suspect Manson," Dr. Coffee said. "Since mononitrobenzene is used in dyeing leather for black shoes, Manson must be well acquainted with its deadly qualities. I'm sure you'll find drums of it at the factory to prove his access to the poison. And with the key to this apartment in his possession—"

Dr. Coffee was interrupted by a childish whimper. Manson sank into a chair, tried to speak, then buried his dead-white face in his big hands.

"Hey, look!" Ritter said. "This other wire is from New Orleans. The spice importer ain't been near Northbank in months. He just got back from a three-day fishing trip in the Gulf." Ritter frowned. "Then who got Holliday over to Northbank on a wild-goose chase?"

"Roy Manson, of course," Dr. Coffee explained. "He knew that Holliday was still in love with Belinda and was sure to go and see her once he was in Northbank and at loose ends. A visit from Holliday to his ex-wife on the

day of her death would misdirect suspicion in case the subject of murder was brought up. Even Miss Devoto, who also knew that Holliday might go to Belinda's apartment, suspected Holliday when she found Belinda dead. That was why she not only dreamed up that elaborate story about his migraine and the phony auto accident, but even went all out to leave her own fingerprints here."

Max Ritter lighted a cigarette and blew a contemptuous cloud of smoke at the man who sat motionless in the chair. "A swell guy, this Manson. He even brought flowers for Belinda. I'd like him to meet my sister sometime."

"Shoemakers," commented Dr. Mookerji, "should remain stuck to last."

"We're going to stick this shoemaker, all right," Ritter agreed. "And believe me, it's going to last."

"You know, Max," Dr. Coffee said, "when Holliday left my lab this afternoon, I think he realized for the first time that his secretary actually believed he had killed Belinda, and that she was ready to do anything to save his neck, even to taking the rap herself. I'll ask Miss Devoto to come by the lab someday next week. Maybe Doris can give her a few pointers on fixing her hair. She's really quite a good-looking gal, and Holliday may not be aware of it."

NEXT MONTH—

Craig Rice's THE BAD LUCK MURDERS

Edgar Wallace's "THE ENGLISHMAN KONNOR"

Michael Innes' MYSTERIOUS AFFAIR AT ELSINORE

William Campbell Gault's NOBODY WANTS TO KILL

Leslie Charteris' THE UNPOPULAR LANDLORD

and

THE SECRET OF THE RED SAFE

A NEW STORY by BARRY PEROWNE

—in THE SAINT MYSTERY MAGAZINE

the hidden law

by . . . Melville Davisson Post

Abner, "voice and arm of the Lord," faces a problem in early 19th century Virginia—a problem as old as Time. . . .

WE HAD come out to Dudley Betts' house and were standing in a bit or meadow. It was an afternoon of April; there had been a shower of rain, and now the sun was on the velvet grass and the white-headed clover blossoms. The sky was blue above and the earth green below, and swimming between them was an air like lotus. Facing the south upon this sunny field was a stand of bees, thatched with rye-straw and covered over with a clapboard roof, the house of each tribe a section of a hollow gumtree, with a cap on the top for the tribute of honey to the human tyrant. The bees had come out after the shower was gone, and they hummed at their work with the sound of a spinner.

Randolph stopped and looked down upon the humming hive. He lifted his finger with a little circling gesture.

"Singing masons building roofs of gold," he said. "Ah, Abner, William of Avon was a great poet."

My uncle turned about at that

The Uncle Abner stories, many written during the war years, were first published in 1918. Twenty-five years later, the book (which Ellery Queen has called "the finest book of detective short stories written by an American since Poe"), was still being kept in print, in the original trade edition.

From: UNCLE ABNER: MASTER OF MYSTERIES.
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and looked at Randolph and then at the hive of bees. A girl was coming up from the brook below with a pail of water. She wore a simple butternut frock, and she was clean-limbed and straight like those first daughters of the world who wove and spun. She paused before the hive and the bees swarmed about her as about a great clover blossom, and she was at home and unafraid like a child in a company of yellow butterflies. She went on to the spring house with her dripping wooden pail, kissing the tips of her fingers to the bees. We followed, but before the hive my uncle stopped and repeated the line that Randolph had quoted:

" 'Singing masons building roofs of gold,' . . . and over a floor of gold and pillars of gold." He added, "He was a good riddle maker, your English poet, but not so good as Samson, unless I help him out."

I received the fairy fancy with all children's joy. Those little men singing merrily as they laid their yellow floor, and raised their yellow walls, and arched their yellow roof! Singing! The word seemed to open up some sunlit fairy world.

It pleased Randolph to have thus touched my uncle.

"A great poet, Abner," he repeated, "and more than that; he drew lessons from nature valuable for doctrine. Men should hymn as they labor and fill the fields with song and so suck out the virus from the curse. He was a great philosopher, Abner—William of Avon."

"But not so great a philosopher as Saint Paul," replied Abner, and he turned from the bees toward old Dudley Betts, digging in the fields before his door. He put his hands behind him and lifted his stern bronze face.

"Those who coveted after money," he said, "have 'pierced themselves through with many sorrows.' And is it not the truth? Yonder is old Dudley Betts. He is doubled up with aches; he has lost his son; he is losing his life, and he will lose his soul—all for money—'Pierced themselves through with many sorrows,' as Saint Paul said it, and now, at the end he has lost the horde that he slaved for."

The man was a by-word in the hills; mean and narrow, with an economy past belief. He used everything about him to one end and with no thought but gain. He cultivated his fields to the very door, and set his fences out into the road, and he extracted from those about him every tithe of service. He had worked his son until the boy had finally run away across the mountains. He had driven his daughter to the makeshifts of the first patriarchal people—soap from ashes, linen from hemp, and the wheel and

the loom for the frock upon her limbs.

And like every man under a single dominating passion, he grew in suspicion and in fear. He was afraid to lend out his money lest he lose it. He had given so much for this treasure that he would take no chance with it, and so kept it by him in gold.

But caution and fear are not harpies to be halted; they wing on. Betts was dragged far in their claw-feet. There is a land of dim things that these convoys can enter. Betts arrived there. We must not press the earth too hard, old, forgotten peoples believed, lest evil things are squeezed out that strip us and avenge it. And ancient crones, feeble, wrapped up by the fire, warned him: The earth suffered us to reap, but not to glean her. We must not gather up every head of wheat. The earth or dim creatures behind the earth would be offended. It was the oldest belief. The first men poured a little wine out when they drank and brought an offering of their herds and the first fruits of the fields. It was written in the Book. He could get it down and read it.

What did they know that they did this? Life was hard then; men saved all they could. There was some terrible experience behind this custom, some experience that appalled and stamped the race with a lesson!

At first Betts laughed at their warnings; then he cursed at them, and his changed manner marked how far he had got. The laugh meant disbelief, but the curse meant fear.

And now, the very strangest thing had happened: The treasure that the old man had so painfully laid up had mysteriously vanished clear away. No one knew it. Men like Betts, cautious and secretive, are dumb before disaster. They conceal the deep mortal hurt as though to hide it from themselves.

He had gone in the night and told Randolph and Abner, and now they had come to see his house.

He put down his hoe when we came up and led us in. It was a house like those of the first men, with everything in it home-made–hand-woven rag-carpets on the floor, and hand-woven coverlets on the beds; tables and shelves and benches of rude carpentry. These things spoke of the man's economy. But there were also things that spoke of his fear: The house was a primitive stockade. The door was barred with a beam, and there were heavy shutters at the windows; an ax stood by the old man's bed and an ancient dueling pistol hung by its trigger-guard to a nail.

I did not go in, for youth is

cunning. I sat down on the doorstep and fell into so close a study of a certain wasp at work under a sill that I was overlooked as a creature without ears; but I had ears of the finest and I lost no word.

The old man got two splint-bottom chairs and put them by the table for his guests, and then he brought a blue earthen jar and set it before them. It was one of the old-fashioned glazed jars peddled by the hucksters, smaller but deeper than a crock, with a thick rim and two great ears. In this he kept his gold pieces until on a certain night they had vanished.

The old man's voice ran in and out of a whisper as he told the story. He knew the very night, because he looked into his jar before he slept and every morning when he got out of his bed. It had been a devil's night—streaming clouds drove across an iron sky, a thin crook of a moon sailed, and a high bitter wind scythed the earth.

Everybody remembered the night when he got out his almanac and named it. There had been noises, old Betts said, but he could not define them. Such a night is full of voices; the wind whispers in the chimney and the house frame creaks. The wind had come on in gusts at sunset, full of dust and whirling leaves, but later it had got up into a gale. The fire had gone out and the house inside was black as a pit. He did not know what went on inside or out, but he knew that the gold was gone at daylight, and he knew that no living human creature had got into his house. The bar on his door held and the shutters were bolted. Whatever entered, entered through the keyhole or through the throat of a chimney that a cat would stick in.

Abner said nothing, but Randolph sat down to an official inquiry:

"You have been robbed, Betts," he said. "Somebody entered your house that night."

"Nobody entered it," replied the old man in his hoarse, half-whispered voice, "either on that night or any other night. The door was fast, Squire."

"But the thief may have closed it behind him."

Betts shook his head. "He could not put up the bar behind him, and besides I set it in a certain way. It was not moved. And the windows—I bolt them and turn the bolt at a certain angle. No human touched them."

It was not possible to believe that this man could be mistaken. One could see with what care he had set his little traps—the bar across the door precisely at a certain hidden line; the bolts of the window shutters turned precisely to an angle that he alone knew. It was not likely that Ran-

dolph would suggest anything that this cautious old man had not already thought of.

"Then," continued Randolph, "the thief concealed himself in your house the day before the robbery and got out of it on the day after."

But again Betts shook his head, and his eyes ran over the house and to a candle on the mantelpiece.

"I look," he said, "every night before I go to bed."

And one could see the picture of this old, fearful man, looking through his house with the smoking tallow candle, peering into every nook and corner. Could a thief hide from him in this house that he knew inch by inch? One could not believe it. The creature took no chance; he had thought of every danger, this one among them, and every night he looked! He would know, then, the very cracks in the wall. He would have found a rat.

Then, it seemed to me, Randolph entered the only road there was out of this mystery.

"Your son knew about this money?"

"Yes," replied Betts, " 'Lander knew about it. He used to say that a part of it was his because he had worked for it as much as I had. But I told him," and the old man's voice cheeped in a sort of laugh, "that he was mine."

"Where was your son Philander when the money disappeared?" said Randolph.

"Over the mountains," said Betts; "he had been gone a month." Then he paused and looked at Randolph. "It was not 'Lander. On that day he was in the school that Mr. Jefferson set up. I had a letter from the master asking for money . . . I have the letter," and he got up to get it.

But Randolph waved his hand and sat back in his chair with the aspect of a brooding oracle.

It was then that my uncle spoke.

"Betts," he said, "how do you think the money went?"

The old man's voice got again into that big crude whisper.

"I don't know, Abner."

But my uncle pressed him.

"What do you think?"

Betts drew a little nearer to the table.

"Abner," he said, "there are a good many things going on around a man that he doesn't understand. We turn out a horse to pasture, and he comes in with hand-holts in his mane . . . You have seen it?"

"Yes," replied my uncle.

And I had seen it too, many a time, when the horses were brought up in the spring from pasture, their manes twisted and knotted into loops, as though to furnish a hand-holt to a rider.

"Well, Abner," continued the old man in his rustling whisper

"who rides the horse? You cannot untie or untwist those hand-holts—you must cut them out with shears—with iron. Is it true?"

"It is true," replied my uncle.

"And why, eh, Abner? Because those hand-holts were never knotted in by any human fingers! You know what the old folk say?"

"I know," answered my uncle. "Do you believe it, Betts?"

"Eh, Abner!" he croaked in the gutteral whisper. "If there were no witches, why did our fathers hang up iron to keep them off? My grandmother saw one burned in the old country. She had ridden the king's horse, and greased her hands with shoemakers' wax so her fingers would not slip in the mane . . . Shoemakers' wax! Mark you that, Abner!"

"Betts," cried Randolph, "you are a fool; there are no witches!"

"There was the Witch of Endor," replied my uncle. "Go on, Betts."

"By gad, sir!" roared Randolph, "if we are to try witches, I shall have to read up James the First. That Scotch king wrote a learned work on demonology. He advised the magistrates to search on the body of the witch for the seal of the devil; that would be a spot insensible to pain, and, James said, 'Prod for it with a needle:' "

But my uncle was serious.

"Go on, Betts," he said. "I do not believe that any man entered your house and robbed you. But why do you think that a witch did?"

"Well, Abner," answered the old man, "who could have got in but such a creature? A thief cannot crawl through a keyhole, but there are things that can. My grandmother said that once in the old country a man awoke one night to see a gray wolf sitting by his fireside. He had an ax, as I have, and he fought the wolf with that and cut off its paw, whereupon it fled screaming through the keyhole. And the paw lying on the floor was a woman's hand!"

"Then, Betts," cried Randolph, "it's damned lucky that you didn't use your ax, if that is what one finds on the floor."

Randolph had spoken with pompous sarcasm, but at the words there came upon Abner's face a look of horror.

"It is," he said, "in God's name!"

Betts leaned forward in his chair.

"And what would have happened to me, Abner, do you think, if I had used my ax? Would I have died there with the ax in my hand?"

The look of horror remained upon my uncle's face.

"You would have wished for that when the light came; to die is sometimes to escape the pit."

"I would have fallen into hell, then?"

"Aye, Betts," replied my uncle, "straightway into hell!"

The old man rested his hands on the posts of the chair.

"The creatures behind the world are baleful creatures," he muttered in his big whisper.

Randolph got up at that.

"Damme!" he said. "Are we in the time of Roger Williams, and is this Massachusetts, that witches ride and men are filched of their gold by magic and threatened with hell fire? What is this cursed foolery, Abner?"

"It is no foolery, Randolph," replied my uncle, "but the living truth."

"The truth!" cried Randolph. "Do you call it the truth that creatures, not human, able to enter through the keyhole and fly away, have Betts' gold, and if he fought against this robbery with his ax he would have put himself in torment? Damme, man! In the name of common sense, do you call this the truth?"

"Randolph," replied Abner, and his voice was slow and deep, "it is every word the truth."

Randolph moved back the chair before him and sat down. He looked at my uncle curiously.

"Abner," he said, "you used to be a crag of common sense. The legends and theories of fools broke on you and went to pieces. Would you now testify to witches?"

"And if I did," replied my uncle, "I should have Saint Paul behind me."

"The fathers of the church fell into some errors," replied Randolph.

"The fathers of the law, then?" said Abner.

Randolph took his chin in his hand at that. "It is true," he said, "that Sir Matthew Hale held nothing to be so well established as the fact of witchcraft for three great reasons, which he gave in their order, as became the greatest judge in England: First, because it was asserted in the Scriptures; second, because all nations had made laws against it; and, third, because the human testimony in support of it was overwhelming. I believe that Sir Matthew had knowledge of some six thousand cases. . . . But Mr. Jefferson has lived since then, Abner, and this is Virginia."

"Nevertheless," replied my uncle, "after Mr. Jefferson, and in Virginia, this thing has happened."

Randolph swore a great oath.

"Then, by gad, sir, let us burn the old women in the villages until the creatures who carried Betts' treasures through the keyhole bring it back!"

Betts spoke then.

"They have brought some of it back!"

My uncle turned sharply in his chair.

"What do you mean, Betts?" he said.

"Why this, Abner," replied the old man, his voice descending into the cavernous whisper: "on three mornings I have found some of my gold pieces in the jar. And they came as they went, Abner, with every window fastened down and the bar across the door. And there is another thing about these pieces that have come back—they are mine, for I know every piece—but they have been in the hands of the creatures that ride the horses in the pasture—they have been handled by witches!" He whispered the word with a fearful glance about him. "How do I know that? Wait, I will show you!"

He went over to his bed and got out a little box from beneath his cornhusk mattress—a worn, smoke-stained box with a sliding lid. He drew the lid off with his thumb and turned the contents out on the table.

"Now look," he said; "look, there is wax on every piece! Shoemakers' wax, mark you. . . . Eh, Abner! My mother said that—the creatures grease their hands with that so that their fingers will not slip when they ride the barebacked horses in the night. They have carried this gold clutched in their hands, see, and the wax has come off!"

My uncle and Randolph leaned over the table. They examined the coins.

"By the Eternal!" cried Randolph. "It *is* wax! But were they clean before?"

"They were clean," the old man answered. "The wax is from the creatures' fingers. Did not my mother say it?"

My uncle sat back in his chair, but Betts strained forward and put his fearful query:

"What do you think, Abner; will all the gold come back?"

My uncle did not at once reply. He sat for some time silent, looking through the open door at the sunny meadowland and the far-off hills. But finally he spoke like one who has worked out a problem and got the answer.

"It will not all come back," he said.

"How much, then?" whispered Betts.

"What is left," replied Abner, "when the toll is taken out."

"You know where the gold is?"

"Yes."

"And the creatures that have it, Abner," Betts whispered, "they are not human?"

"They are not human!" replied my uncle.

Then he got up and began to walk about the house, but not to search for clews to this mysterious thing. He walked like one who examines something within himself—or something beyond the eye—and old Betts followed him with his straining face. And Randolph sat in his chair with

his arms folded and his chin against his stock, as a skeptic overwhelmed by proof might sit in a house of haunted voices. He was puzzled upon every hand. The thing was out of reason at every point, both in the loss and in the return of these coins upon the table, and my uncle's comments were below the soundings of all sense. The creatures who now had Betts' gold could enter through the keyhole! Betts would have gone into the pit if he had struck out with his ax! A moiety of this treasure would be taken out and the rest returned! And the coins testified to no human handling! The thing had no face nor aspect of events in nature. Mortal thieves enjoyed no such supernal powers. These were the attributes of the familiar spirit. Nor did the human robber return a per cent upon his gains!

I have said that my uncle walked about the floor. But he stopped now and looked down at the hard, miserly old man.

"Betts," he said, "this is a mysterious world. It is hedged about and steeped in mystery. Listen to me! The Patriarchs were directed to make an offering to the Lord of a portion of the increase in their herds. Why? Because the Lord had need of sheep and heifers? Surely not, for the whole earth and its increase were His. There was some other reason, Betts. I do not understand what it was, but I do understand that no man can use the earth and keep every tithe of the increase for himself. They did not try it, but you did!"

He paused and filled his big lungs.

"It was a disastrous experiment. . . . What will you do?"

"What must I do, Abner?" the old man whispered. "Make a sacrifice like the Patriarchs?"

"A sacrifice you must make, Betts," replied my uncle, "but not like the Patriarchs. What you receive from the earth you must divide into three equal parts and keep one part for yourself."

"And to whom shall I give the other two parts, Abner?"

"To whom would you wish to give them, Betts, if you had the choice?"

The old man fingered about his mouth.

"Well," he said, "a man would give to those of his own household first—if he had to give."

"Then," said Abner, "from this day keep a third of your increase for yourself and give the other two-thirds to your son and your daughter."

"And the gold, Abner? Will it come back?"

"A third part will come back. Be content with that."

"And the creatures that have my gold? Will they harm me?"

"Betts," replied my uncle, "the creatures that have your gold on this day hidden in their

house will labor for you as no slaves have ever labored—without word or whip. Do you promise?"

The fearful old man promised, and we went out into the sun.

The tall straight young girl was standing before the springhouse, kneading a dish of yellow butter and singing like a blackbird. My uncle strode down to her. We could not hear the thing he said, but the singing ceased when he began to talk and burst out in a fuller note when he had finished—a big, happy, joyous note that seemed to fill the meadow.

We waited for him before the stand of bees, and Randolph turned on him when he came.

"Abner," he said, "what is the answer to this damned riddle?"

"You gave it, Randolph," he replied — " 'Singing masons building roofs of gold.' " And he pointed to the bees. "When I saw that the cap on one of the gums had been removed I thought Betts' gold was there, and when I saw the wax on the coins I was certain."

"But," cried Randolph, "you spoke of creatures not human—creatures that could enter through the keyhole — creatures—"

"I spoke of the bees," replied my uncle.

"But you said Betts would have fallen into hell if he struck out with his ax!"

"He would have killed his daughter," replied Abner. "Can you think of a more fearful hell? She took the gold and hid it in the bee cap. But she was honest with her father; whenever she sent a sum of money to her brother she returned an equal number of gold pieces to old Betts' jar."

"Then," said Randolph, with a great oath, "there is no witch here with her familiar spirits?"

"Now that," replied my uncle, "will depend upon the imagery of language. There is here a subtle maiden and a stand of bees!"

suggestion of death

by . . . T. S. Stribling

Why was it necessary that the old man should die? What force—what ancient force—ruled in Tacuba?

POGGIOLI and I arrived in Tacuba last night. This Sunday morning we were aroused by multitudinous church bells ringing in all directions. Mexican church bells ring very fast, like village fire alarms. To the old-fashioned orthodox churchmen they were, in a way, just that. I called to Poggioli from my bed, "Hear that? You realize now they have three hundred and sixty-five churches in this town, one for every day in the year."

Poggioli lifted his head and said around a yawn, "No, they don't . . . days of the year have nothing to do with it."

"There's three hun—"

"I understand that. But those churches were built to mask Aztec temples. That was their real purpose—not a church for every day in the year. Now, the Aztecs undoubtedly erected three hundred and sixty-five temples, one for each day in the year—"

Somehow such hair-splitting annoyed me. "Isn't that the same thing?"

"Is it the same thing for one

Pulitzer Prize winner T. S. Stribling, to quote Anthony Boucher, "is the only detective story writer who ever succeeded in viewing his detective with complete objectivity." This is true here, too, in this story which Poggioli felt, while no surprise to him, *"should startle many readers"...*

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man to build an airplane to go somewhere and another to wreck it so he can't get there?"

I made no answer to this. It was just some more of Poggioli's habitual, college-professor's sarcasm. I asked him presently why he supposed the Aztecs had a temple for every day in the year. He said that was what he had come to Tacuba to investigate.

From the piazza of the Reina de Espagna, the hotel where we lodge, Poggioli and I watch the crowds stream by to mass and to the cockfights. On the wall of an ancient church across the *calle* I can see the advertizement of a bull fight. Poggiolo philosophizes on the connection between religious rites and fights. He wonders if it is possible that the cockpit and bull ring are halfway houses between old Aztec ritual and present-day worship? The old Spanish conquistadors were extraordinarily practical men. They took what they found in the Indians, physical and spiritual, and moulded it into something viable. We English in the North eradicated our autochtons, saving nothing, either physical or spiritual.

In the crowd an old peon in a red blanket hurries past holding under his arm a gray gamecock. Poggioli comments on the accidental stylistic perfection of this composition. Had the colors been reversed—blanket gray, cock red —stress would have fallen on the fowl, not on the peon. As it is, there is something arresting, even startling, in the old man's tortured face. However, it may be that the old cock-fighter is not tortured at all. That is simply the way old Mexican Indians look, as is proved by the canvasses of Orozco and Rivera.

Presently Poggioli asked me why I supposed the crowd was in such a hurry. I said, I didn't know. Poggioli continued with his coffee and presently Belita came out to the hotel's sidewalk tables with more rolls. The criminologist asked her the same question. She began impulsively, *"Ca, Señor,* the moon is full to—" then seemed to catch herself and finished casually, "They are always in a hurry . . . the peons."

This last was so funny that when she went inside I began laughing. For some reason Poggioli was not at all amused. He looked after the old Indian with the gray cock who was just disappearing around a church corner.

"I wonder what Belita is concealing," he said slowly. "What could she possibly want to hide from us, a pair of perectly haphazard tourists? . . ."

"Why, a crime," I said, "certainly a crime!" I began laughing at Poggioli because that man can twist the slightest, the most trivial, *lapsus linguae* that anybody

makes into a remote but unerring clue to some sort of crime. It's a mania with him.

Poggioli paid little attention to my satire. He finished his coffee, got up. "Let's walk to the cockfights."

"I thought you came here to study religion," I replied.

"I did," he said, "but who knows—their religion may begin with cockfights."

"Now, why make a rationalization like that?" I demanded.

"The moon," said Poggioli. "Belita's accidental, but truthful and immediately corrected reference to the moon, and the further fact that the old Aztecs did have a lunar religion."

Since I make my living out of Poggioli, writing down his dull and pompous efforts at satire along with his criminological deductions, I finished my coffee and followed.

There is no use describing a Mexican cockfight; the circle of tense *aficionados,* binding on the gyves, pitting the birds, the tragic momentary flutter of two utterly fearless little creatures and the death of one or both—I wouldn't describe it if I could. But this time Poggioli called my attention to the tenseness, the air of expectancy—I might almost say, apprehension—that seemed to hang over the crowd; not only in the midst of a fight but between duels. It was a constant. Poggioli asked me what I made of it. I said, "Heaven knows I don't know. What do *you* make of it?"

He gave a little shrug and said, "As a rule tension is relieved by some expected denouement."

The Indians had loads of cocks, all of them wanting to fight. They reminded me of military organizations. We again saw our old Indian with the red blanket and the gray fighter. His face was still in tortured wrinkles but so were most of the other faces. His must have meant nothing at all. I presently quit noticing our particular peon because there was a tall, dark, aquiline man by the cockpit who gradually became for me the center of the crowd. Everybody knows what I mean. There is always one person who becomes the personification of the crowd. Different spectators pick different persons for their "centers." I often choose a fat round man or a beautiful woman as my barometer, and I keep glancing at him or her to see how the show goes. This time, however, it was this tall, Romanesque sort of man, not exactly gloomy but certainly not cheerful.

Eventually, our peon pitted his cock against another. The two birds flickered through their usual passes. I glanced up at my Romanesque Indian to judge by his expression how the fight was progressing, because I really knew nothing about the sport. When I looked back again, the other rooster was down and our

gray one was crowing. I felt a certain relief that our old peon had won, for I assumed that the possible loss of the fight was what had given him such an anxious, tortured face. I saw him stoop to pick up his excited cock when the bird leaped upward and fluttered a moment over his wrist.

I hardly noticed this maneuver of the fighting fowl; it didn't occur to me that it could mean anything; but a kind of sigh, a sort of tense exhalation, arose from the spectators. Poggioli beside me said in an undertone, "So that's what the crowd was waiting for."

"Waiting for what?" I asked.

"That cock cut the old man's arm as he picked it up."

I looked and sure enough, I saw a stain and drip from our peon's wrist. The old man stood looking at the wound the bird had inflicted with one of its gyves. The sight somehow gave me a queer feeling. I said, "How could the crowd be waiting for that when they couldn't have known it was going to happen?" Poggioli lifted a hand to express his own ignorance.

I kept looking and finally I said, "Isn't the old fellow going to do anything about it? He's hurt badly enough to make a splotch there on the ground." But he didn't do anything, just stood looking at his arm; everybody else was watching it, too. Finally I pushed my way through the crowd to the old man. I had in mind that I at least would do something for him because, in a way, he was mine and Poggioli's peon. We had, you might say, artistically adopted the old man.

When I got to him I was shocked at his yellow, clayey face and bloodless lips, and his wrist was still bleeding. The old fellow sat down. I pulled out my handkerchief and picked up a little stick off the ground—to improvise a tourniquet. As I knotted my cloth and bent over, a hand on my shoulder drew me back and a calm but severe and positive baritone voice said in blurry Spanish, *"El ley, Señor,"* . . . the law, *Señor*. The man who had stopped me was our Roman senator in copper.

Then I realized there must be some sort of law in Mexico analogous to our own law about wounded motorists. Our law says that nobody can assist one of them without becoming responsible for his death, if he dies. The strict legal procedure is to wait for an ambulance. If there is no ambulance coming, one just waits. That was what this crowd was doing. I started back to our hotel. If I couldn't do anything, I didn't want to be there.

Poggioli joined me on the outskirts of the crowd. "Why in the world did you think you could stop something the whole crowd had been waiting for?" I asked.

Poggioli lifted a shoulder with

a kind of logical reproach in his tone. "You saw the crowd waiting for something to happen . . . this happened . . . suddenly the suspense was over. Since the crowd was obviously waiting for him to be wounded, then letting him alone after his mishap must be customary."

"Poggioli," I said, "there is nothing wrong with your reasoning if I admit the cock spurring the old man was a part of the program—but that's impossible."

"Which do you consider the more convincing—your logic or the reaction of the whole crowd?"

As I had no answer, I asked him what was his explanation of a large group of sportsmen actually feeling relief when one of their number got hurt. He said he didn't know, that somehow it might link with Belita's hesitancy in answering our question that morning as to why the crowd was hurrying. I broke into incredulous laughter at the thought that Belita's hesitancy in answering our question that morning as to why the crowd was hurrying. I broke into incredulous laughter at the thought that Belita's boggling over a very simple question could possibly have any connection with this rooster cutting the old peon's artery.

There was no link conceivable between the two incidents.

(I jot these things down in my notes just as they happened; I don't believe they can ever take on a story form.)

We didn't see Belita again until next morning, when she brought coffee to our room. She seemed gay and uplifted, as if she had been delivered from evil. Poggioli asked in a casual tone, "Belita, the old peon died yesterday, didn't he?"

"Sí Señor."

"Belita, is that why you seem so relieved this morning?"

The girl stared at him, drew in a breath. "Do I seem relieved, *Señor?*" Then, antagonistically: "Why should I seem relieved, *Señor,* at poor old Juan's death?"

This evening we went to Swilly Bill's night club for dinner. It caters particularly to American tourists but everybody goes. There are similar spots in all the larger Mexican towns, called variously, Sloppy Joe's, Swilly Bill's, Messy Mat's, and so on. Whether these clubs are named to attract Americans to express their owner's opinions of Americans, I don't know. All have jazz bands manned by Mexicans and these bands play under artificial palms made of cork, even when real palms grow all around the place. I suppose it is to make the Americans feel at home. And the Americans all gather there to see native life and the Mexicans come to see American life. This gives both a pleasant sense of superiority.

I often take my chessmen to the night clubs and after I have eaten, I set them up on my table and nearly aways get a game. Tonight I was not disappointed. A Mexican gentleman in modish English clothes stopped at our table and with a gesture indicated my men. I am sure he knew by my appearance that I couldn't speak Spanish. I nodded an invitation for him to have a seat and concealed a black and a white pawn in my hands for him to choose a color. As I looked fully into his face, I received a queer shock. The fellow was the Roman-senator peon who had been the "center" of my crowd at the cockfight.

Naturally it surprised me that a man who wore a blanket at one place should appear in very stylish attire at the night club, but surprise wasn't the core of my emotion. It was uneasiness; it was some vague kind of apprehension; what of, I did not know.

Now I like riddles and problems; that is why I play chess and write mysteries; but I don't like them to backfire on me. And this man impressed me, both at the cockfight and here at the chess table, as an excellent person to let alone. Behind this feeling was not only the Mexican's grim appearance but the fact that he really had stopped me from saving the life of the old Indian with the gray cock. He was heartless—I could see that much in his face.

As we played, I was eager for Poggioli to notice my opponent. I kept glancing at the criminologist, trying to catch his eye, but my friend seemed to be immersed in some problem of his own.

Naturally, under all these stresses, I lost the game. Our Roman-senator arose and bowed his thanks with the dignity that all Mexicans possess, and then walked away from our table toward the street, in the direction of the Mexican orchestra under the artificial palms.

The moment he was out of hearing I whispered to Poggioli, "Did you see who that man was?" He said who, and I said, "Why, the peon—the old Roman peon at the cockfight! Here he is coming to the night club dressed like a politician in a silk-stocking ward!"

Poggioli nodded. "They do look alike."

"Look alike! Why, they're the same man."

"Mm-mm . . . no-o . . . different aura."

"What do you mean . . . aura?" I said.

"Oh, personality . . . atmosphere . . . impression. That something about every man which you can feel but can't see."

"It was his English clothes," I said, "which threw you off."

Poggioli dismissed our argument with a wave of his finger. "The point about him that we've

got to decide is something else entirely. Why does he want to see me?"

I stopped placing my chessmen back in their box. "See *you?*"

"Yes. You saw him, didn't you, signal me to follow him out in the street?"

"Why, no-o! Did he? I watched him walk away. That's all he did."

"Yes, true enough, but in what direction did he walk?"

"Toward the jazz band," I said.

"There you are—toward the jazz band," repeated Poggioli, with the satisfaction of a wrangler who had made his opponent concede a point. "You certainly admit that is a signal to me to follow him outside?"

I just sat and looked at Poggioli. I hadn't the remotest idea what he was driving at. So he went on. "He walked toward the jazz band. Now do people ordinarily, when they leave a club like this, depart in the direction of the music?"

"No, I don't suppose they do. So what?"

"And especially if it were disagreeable music—harsh, dissonant music—in fact, not music at all, just braying, for that is what American jazz is to these Mexicans. For a Mexican to have got up and walked . . . toward . . . music . . . What must that have meant?"

I tried to think of something deep but finally I had to say, "He wanted to get out and go home."

Poggioli gave the brief, hopeless laugh that he uses in his class at Ohio State University. "Now, listen," he said, "I'll analyze his action. He knew that if I were the psychologist that I am reputed to be I would notice his leaving in precisely the opposite direction he would normally take. If he wanted my attention that badly, he could easily have spoken to me here at the table, but he didn't do it. By saying nothing and walking in the direction of the jazz music he accomplished two things: he tested me to see if I really were an acute, sensitive psychologist, and secondly, it told me of his dire—I might almost say, desperate—need for the assistance of such a trained psychologist."

"Poggioli," I said, "would you mind telling me, as a friend, what you are talking about?"

"I am saying that man, for some reason, did not want to ask me in so many words to come outside with him; so he gave me a very subtle signal which no one but a psychologist would catch. I therefore analyze him as a highly educated man of great sensitivity. Furthermore, he must have some enemy here in the club tonight from whom he wants to conceal his meeting with me; otherwise, he would simply have asked me to go home with him. He is standing outside the club

building now waiting to see if I will follow him."

I can hardly express my feeling for such a fantastic notion. The idea of deducing all this rigmarole because a man walked out of a night club in the direction of the jazz band! I told Poggioli flat-footed what I thought of the matter. He said he wouldn't have dreamed of placing such an interpretation on the fellow's action if it had not been for the other things that have been happening. I asked him what other things. He said the peon getting killed at the cockfight and Belita's shifting her reasons when questioned that morning. I said to him, "Poggioli, you are trying to string together things that have no earthly connection."

"Possibly, possibly," agreed the psychologist, "but sometimes I find that a number of inexplicable details link together and make a quite explicable whole. That's my only reason for . . ."

"All right," I interrupted, "to prove you are completely wrong in this instance, I'm going outside and see if the man is waiting for you."

Poggioli pursed his lips in doubt. "I had thought of that myself, but I came down here for rest, not work, and besides I am sure neither of us wants to incur any personal danger." I couldn't help smiling at that. "The old peon with the cock got killed," recalled Poggioli gravely.

"Then what are we supposed to do?" I asked. "Go to a cockfight and get ourselves killed?"

"No, no, certainly not," he said soberly, "it wouldn't be *that* method."

"You sound as if somebody had hundreds of different methods of inflicting . . ."

"You'll simply have to wait," advised my friend, "until enough of these incidents occur for us to construct a theory around them, and . . . we don't want to be one of the incidents ourselves."

Now, I remembered that Poggioli's theories, grotesque as some of them are, always seem to work out. So I sat looking at him and pondering. Heaven knows I don't court personal danger, but if there is a story in the thing . . .

"Poggioli," I said, "as a favor to me will you permit me to follow that man and see if he is really waiting out in the street?"

"Mm-mm . . . I hate to become involved even as a counselor in an affair like this . . . completely outside the psychology of our Anglo-Saxon civilization. Oh, go ahead . . . it may fit in with my own researches . . ."

If I hadn't been almost positive that Poggioli had imagined a mare's-nest, I don't believe I would have gone. For him to attribute such subtlety to a man who couldn't even speak English amused me. I know it's provincial to think like that, but we Americans do feel that if a man doesn't

speak our language, he can't be so very brilliant, and it would take a genius to signal Poggioli in any such fashion as he had imagined. So I got up and walked to the door behind the orchestra, rather amused at the futility of my own gesture. Still it would show Poggioli how far astray his deductions could wander, which would be an indirect feather in my cap. I was still smiling when I opened the door and stepped out into the street.

There stood the man on the narrow sidewalk looking at the moon.

I came within a squeak of closing the door and walking back inside again. The thought flashed across my mind: "Poggioli's string of deductions is correct . . . this fellow is connected with the cock murder, Belita's guilty conscience, and our own danger." Then came the thought: "What a story this will make if I ever get an explanation for it!" So I walked on.

Yes, there he stood on the two-foot sidewalk looking up at the moon between the spires of the cathedral. The moment I appeared he started away; but in his going he walked so close to me that he touched me—in fact, he slipped a bit of paper in my hand. Then he disappeared around the corner. Neither of us said a word.

It was all so impossible that I just stood there for two or three minutes, looking at the moon above the church, with all sorts of vague fantasies floating through my head. I turned and went back inside to Poggioli. As I approached him at the table, he lifted a brow at me. I nodded. He took the note without a word and opened it. To our surprise it was in English; it read:

Dr. Henry Poggioli, Esteemed Sir,

I have a request to make of you which is vital to me. I stand in great need of the assistance of a psychologist. It means life or death to me. Will you have the great kindness to meet me tonight at two fifty-eight o'clock at the eighty-first kilometer stone? P. S. Read this note once, then destroy it.

We sat and looked at each other. Then Poggioli drew out a cigarette lighter, flipped it open, and burned the note.

"Why that?" I asked.

"Why a kilometer stone at two fifty-eight o'clock at night?" said Poggioli. He pulled at his bluish chin for a moment in thought, then said, "Well, let's get going."

We turned out of Swilly Bill's, walked to our taxicab, and woke Pancho in the driver's seat. Poggioli glanced at his watch and told our driver that we were due at the eighty-first kiolometer stone in exactly sixteen minutes.

"Sí, Sí, Señores." Pancho jumped out and began to crank his jalopy. In the midst of

his preparations, he suddenly straightened and asked as if he had not heard right. "Where did you say you were going, *Señor?*"

Poggioli repeated: "To the eighty-first kilometer stone."

Pancho did not resume his tinkering. He put his hands on his radiator. "*Señores* . . . it is nothing to me, *cierta-minte,* but . . . but *porqué?* Why would you want to go to . . ."

"To tell you the truth, Pancho," said Poggioli, "we don't know."

"You don't know?"

"We haven't the slightest idea."

"Hadn't I better take you back to the hotel, *Señores?*"

"No, the eighty-first . . ."

Pancho thumped his radiator in regret. "*Señor,* I remember now. . . . I am sorry . . . but I took out my spark plugs to clean them when we first came to this night club . . . then I sat down and went to sleep. . . ."

"Pancho, where are your spark plugs?" asked my friend.

Our little man looked about aimlessly in the semi-darkness. "I took them out. . . . I laid them. . . . I wonder if somebody stole them while I was asleep!" His loss seemed not to disturb him; he pointed down a glimmering *calle.* "Why don't the *Señores* walk? It isn't very far and you will have a light to walk by—the moon goes down at two fifty-eight tonight."

He eyed us obliquely as he made his last observation. If he were looking for some sign from us, he was disappointed because neither of us knew anything.

Now, when a Mexican chauffeur turns down an American fare, something is seriously wrong. Poggioli and I walked on down toward kilometer stone eighty-one, speculating on what it would be. I could hear my friend repeating to himself in an undertone the links in our problem . . . expectant crowd . . . game cock murder . . . servant girl knew something . . . chess player . . . chauffeur quits . . . moon goes down. . . . Of course, the trouble was that he had no assurance that these incidents really were connected. They might not be incidents at all, just accidents. I spoke aloud as we walked past one after another of the dark mysterious churches. "You think Pancho was afraid to come with us?"

"Mm—mm, it could be fear, or it could be fidelity to some religious faith or superstition. Most likely, fear."

I picked a flaw here. I said, "You bring in religious faith and superstition only because you are studying the old Aztec religion."

"Certainly. I realize any habitual train of thought tends to corrupt logical judgment. An ideal detective, I am sure, would be a man who never had an idea in his head about anything." This

last was probably academic sarcasm. I was framing a suitable retort when we reached the end of the city. Mexican cities do not straggle off into suburbs as do our American towns. They end as definitely as a loaf of bread. We had come to the end of town, the *calle* turned into a *camino,* and just a little way beyond where the houses stopped and the street changed into a road, I saw the glimmer of the eighty-first kilometer stone.

Beside it stood our chess player. Before we actually joined him the moon sank and left us in the velvety star-shot darkness of a tropical night. Poggioli whispered to me, "Remember this: it was arranged, it will fit in somehow." That was all he had time to say. He referred, I think, to the moon-set.

The man in the gloom greeted us in excellent English and still more surprisingly, spoke with an Oxford accent. Why hadn't he talked to me over the chess game in Swilly Bill's? This was just one of the many riddles our conversation with him developed. I am sorry I cannot reproduce our entire talk, but it was a black night and I couldn't even see the pad on which I attempted to make notes. The best I could manage were brief sentences summarizing the different subjects the two men discussed. Later in our hotel I expanded some of these from memory. Here is the list:

1. Power of the suggestion of death.

The fellow introduced this theme into what seemed to be a purely impersonal conversation between two scientific men. Poggioli's observation was this, and it struck me as a good one. "To suggest death to a man might lead to serious illness. It would be impossible, however, really to produce death because as the mind weakened its own power of lethal suggestion would decrease; so, on the very brink of death, the mind would become inert and the body would continue to live."

The unseen man said, "That's assuming that what men call the soul is simply a function of the body, not a separate entity." I agreed to this. "Then if suggestion can slay a man," went on the unseen speaker, "would not that tend to prove the independence and possible continuity of the soul?"

I answered that the mere suggestion of a soul was so far removed from American materialistic thinking that I would not attempt to follow him in that realm of speculation.

2. The next theme I have on my list was a discussion between Poggioli and the man on "soul energy," whatever that may mean. The man in the dark drew a macabre analogy between the development of energy through

the destruction of the atom, and the possible use of energy through the destruction of the human soul. He suggested ascending gradations of power—simple matter as we know it, molecules, atoms, electrons and protons, soul. And he pointed out that the human will or the human soul could perform labor at a distance without actual physical contact. This was as dramatic a gain over atomic power as atomic power was over molecular power. In proof of this "soul power" he cited experiments recently performed with dice at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. There it was proved that the unaided human will could influence the fall of dice.

Here I interposed to say that the fall of a die was such a trivial exhibition of power. He agreed to that but pointed out that for decades scientists had known of atomic power only through enormously magnified photographs of liberated ions. Comparing that to controlling the roll of a die would be like comparing a feather with the weight of the earth. Which, of course, as queer as it may sound, is perfectly true. Then he went on to press the point that this "mind force" operated at a distance, without contact, lifting it completely above our ordinary conception of energy into a realm new and unexplored by Western science.

Of course, that too was true, but I didn't see what all this was leading to.

Then he spoke of the fertility of the Mexican land, how it had borne crop after crop for unnumbered centuries, whereas the soil in America required fertilizers and some of it was already abandoned as nonproductive. All this had nothing to do with the mystery in hand; it is every citizen's right to praise his own country and decry other lands.

The man in the darkness drifted next into local history. He mentioned again Tacuba's three hundred and sixty-five churches, and the fact that they were built to cover up old Aztec temples. On the heels of this statement he related a very queer story. He said all monastic institutions had been banned in Mexico by law ever since the day of Jaurez. However, a nunnery had managed to exist in Pueblo, Mexico, through all those years. It was camouflaged by shops and houses and was discovered accidentally by a police officer who put his hand on an oil painting which in reality was a bell cord at the entrance of the nunnery. A door opened in a blank wall and the abbess appeared and asked him what he wanted.

Finally our host—I suppose I might call him our host, since he invited us to meet him at the kilometer stone—asked Poggioli in a very serious voice if Western psychology had developed any de-

fense against the power of suggestion.

"No mental defense," said Poggioli; "some physical defense, possibly, like a stimulant or a sedative. You see, Western psychology, in contradistinction to Eastern psychology, does not credit the existence of the soul. Its experiments are purely physical, conducted in laboratories with mechanical equipment. It contrives no defense against black magic and no aid of white magic because it does not believe in such things. Actually Western psychology stands in the grotesque position of a science built around a vacuum; a psychology without a psyche; or, in plain English, 'words about nothing.' "

Our host stood for a moment, silent in the darkness, and finally he asked, "And that is your scientific creed, too, Dr. Poggioli?"

"Certainly. I am a trained Western scientist."

On this completely irrelevant note our visit ended. The man bade us goodbye and Poggioli and I started back to our hotel. I must admit I was disappointed. I had nothing writable, no mystery story—just a faint suggestion of the eerie which is the Western reaction to the idea of soul; nothing by any stretch of the imagination solid enough to mould into a mystery story salable to the American public.

As I say, I was disappointed, and then, as a sort of sop to my typewriter, chance tossed me one little touch of the mysterious that is writable.

We were passing a Mexican cemetery. There was a hooded lantern in the brick wall above the iron gate, and just as we passed, the gate opened and who should walk out but the chess player we had just left behind us—the same dark, saturnine face. Now, however, he wore an ordinary peon's serape thrown around him, for the night was cool. It gave me a sort of start. I tried to recall whether he had worn the serape when he talked with us at the kilometer stone. I didn't remember it. Poggioli, of course, saw him too, and when the man passed, Poggioli said, "The cockfighter."

"Sure," I agreed, "and also the chess player."

"No," objected my friend. "Why would he, an educated man, run ahead of us, appear in a cemetery's gate in a serape . . ."

"Didn't he have on a serape at the kilometer stone?" I asked.

Poggioli shrugged.

"Will you please tell me why he asked us to meet him at the kilometer stone at all?" I asked.

Poggioli turned and tried to see my face. "You don't know . . . when he told us just as plainly as he possibly could without using so many words?"

"What did he tell us?" I snapped in annoyance, with-

out using so many words?"

"He told us . . . Let me see . . . a lot of things: that there is still an old Aztec temple going full blast in Tacuba."

"For Heaven's sake, Poggioli, how did you ever . . ."

"Why should he have mentioned the nunnery hidden for decades in Pueblo if he hadn't meant . . ."

"That was just gossip," I said.

"That man would not gossip —not when he was trying to get some sort of magical formula to save a life, possibly his own . . ."

"Save his . . . why do you imagine that?"

"That's why he mentioned the richness of the Mexican land after centuries of cultivation. The priests at this Aztec temple still offer human sacrifices to the gods of fertility."

"But, Poggioli, that wouldn't have anything to do with the actual richness of the land!"

"Sure of that?"

"Certainly I am — that's the crudest superstition!"

"Of course, I think you are right. I'm an American the same as you . . . but think of the energy in an atomic bomb."

"All right, I'm thinking of it. What about it?"

"Try to imagine a subtler energy than that, a more refined energy, a something or other that doesn't require any physical contact whatever to operate on matter. Energy that will work at a distance just as efficiently as if brought in direct contact."

"You are now talking the same twaddle he was giving us about experiments with dice at Duke University."

"That's precisely what I am talking about. Imagine such a force, controlled, stepped up to the *n*th degree and then utilized for the enrichment of the soil of this country in what we would call savage fertility rites. . . ."

I made a gesture in the darkness. "Why, that's the most unbelievable—"

"Then why do you suppose the Aztec priests used to sacrifice thousands and thousands of human lives? It was brutal, repulsive work, but they stuck to it. Why? Only because they must have had proof that they were directing the concentrated soul power of hecatombs of victims into the fertilization of their soil . . . fertility rites. And they are still doing it! That old peon whom the cock killed . . . The whole crowd expected a victim: nobody knew who it would be; that was the reason for such enormous relief when the victim was finally revealed. The rest knew it would not be them."

I walked along in a daze. I felt sure that Poggioli was wrong this time. "That copper-colored Roman—he didn't kill the peon himself," I objected.

"I think he did—not with an

obsidian knife, but with psychic power. You see the Western world entered Mexico with Cortez and stopped simple physical sacrifice. The priests made the most of their necessity and evolved psychic murder — *the control of matter at a distance through the human will.* We Westerns are just beginning to touch the fringe of that science by, say, controlling the fall of dice at Duke University." I could feel Poggioli was laughing inwardly at me, at himself, at Americans in general, at our grotesque and lopsided materialistic development. He turned to me again, suddenly. "It follows so perfectly the contrary patterns of the life in the Orient and the Occident," he said.

"What does?" I asked.

"The use to which they put their extremest achievement in science. We developed the atomic bomb amid peaceful labor and used it to destroy cities. They developed the transformation of the energy in the human soul amid scenes of bloodshed and agony and used it to build up the peaceful soil. One is as horrible as the other, but there is more intelligence in theirs."

"Poggioli," I cried, "you don't really believe that, do you?"

"Certainly not. I'm an American the same as you. I don't believe there is any power guiding anything; all is accident. It was an accident that the crowd expected the peon's death. It was an accident that he died. It was an accident that our new friend waited outside Swilly Bill's night club with a note. It was an accident that we found him . . ."

"Then what did the eighty-first kilometer stone have to do with all this?" I demanded.

The kilometer stone, Poggioli replied, was one of two things. It was either the finial of a still-operating Aztec temple . . . here I interrupted in amazement to ask why he suggested such an idea. He said, "To conceal an Aztec temple under a public highway would be a highly Indian ruse." The only reason he toyed with this idea, he explained, was because he knew there was an Aztec temple in Tacuba and he did not know where else to look for it. Also it would explain why our taxi driver absolutely refused to drive us to that particular road marker.

His alternate hypothesis was that the kilometer stone marked the limit of clairaudience for priests in the Aztec temple, wherever it was. That explained why the chess player would say nothing to us in Swilly Bill's Club, but invited us outside the limit of audibility before conversing with us.

We walked the rest of the way to our hotel in silence.

Well, I realized then that I had thrown away my time investigating such an alien situation. I

knew I would never be able to work it into a good standard mystery. Still I couldn't get it off my mind. I lay awake nearly all night long thinking about it. Finally, just before I went to sleep, I decided there was one thing more I could do: make Belita tell me whether the cockfighter and the chess player were one and the same man or different men. I was sure she knew.

So next morning at the breakfast table I questioned her. No, no, she knew nothing whatever about the matter. She seemed rather frightened at the idea of knowing something. Deliberately I laid a hundred-peso note on the table.

"Belita," I said, "are you sure you know nothing about the chess player and the cockfighter?"

The girl wet her lips; her face turned a sickly yellow. *"Señor,"* she whispered, "I . . . I can't tell you . . . anything . . . here."

"Then where?" I asked with rising interest.

"Señor . . ." she looked at the money but seemed about to faint, "if . . . if you will drive me beyond the . . . the eighty-first kilometer stone . . ."

"Sure, sure," I agreed, "have Pancho bring around his car. I'll drive it myself, just you and me and my friend here . . ."

"Sí, Sí, Señores . . ." Her hand shook so the coffee spilled.

We stopped eating breakfast, went out, and all three of us got into Pancho's car and started for the kilometer stone. We didn't tell Pancho where we were going; we probably wouldn't have got his jalopy. Belita began talking as soon as we left the hotel. Her story was very simple. The cockfighter and the chess player were brothers. Their father had been the *alcalde* of Tacuba and he wanted one of his sons to continue as the leading man of the city. He sent one son to Oxford, England, for an education. The other son he kept in Tacuba in order to give him a native education. If the people of Tacuba desired a man of Western education, one of his sons could fill the position; if they desired a man of native education, the other son would be chosen. So these two sons became political rivals and, in the end, deadly enemies.

I interrupted: "Belita, just where and from whom did this other son get his native education?"

"Señor," whispered Belita, "here in Tacuba is an . . . an old . . ." She was staring ahead at the kilometer stone which we now approached. Suddenly she broke into a violent scream. A buzzard, one of those Mexican buzzards which form the street-cleaning department of every Mexican city, was sailing through the air quite low. Revoltingly enough we struck it, its noisome bulk crashed through our wind-

shield. I, too, was shocked, but mainly for the girl. She was so tense and apprehensive already, in such a taut condition, that I knew this accident would wreck her nerves.

I cried to Poggioli to do something. He was already bending over her. He snapped back, "Get to the hospital quick! A piece of glass has cut her throat!"

As I slewed the car around, I remembered some of Poggioli's words: *"Psychic murder* — the control of matter at a distance through the human will . . ."

A NEW APPROACH TO RACKET BUSTING

IN A MOVE that has given the businessmen of crime further reason for concern, the Justice Department is making racket busters of its 94 United States Attorneys from Maine to California. Each will have his own rackets section, directed and assisted from Washington. Prime targets are the narcotics traffickers, the organized gamblers, the white slavers, the labor racketeers and the extortionists, whose annual take runs into billions of dollars. These are the 100 "businessmen" who were the special targets of Attorney General Rogers' Special Group on Organized Crime, set up a year ago. This group, headed by Milton Wessel of New York, and working under direct supervision of the Deputy Attorney General, analyzed available information on the 100 top racketeers, sought further investigation from enforcement agencies, and requested convening of investigatory grand juries. Special Group headquarters were set up in the four major Syndicate centers of operation—New York, Miami, Chicago and Los Angeles. The results have been seen in the daily headlines.

The Special Group's operations have now been integrated into United States Attorney's offices, anti-racketeering units will be set up in the rest of the prosecutors' offices, and responsibility for the campaign against organized crime shifted from the Deputy Attorney General to the Justice Department's Criminal Division and it's Organized Crime and Racketeering Section. Assistant Attorney General Malcolm R. Wilkey, new chief of the Criminal Division, points out that this means that instead of 18 attorneys specializing in racket prosecutions, the number will be expanded to many times this *devoting full time to organized crime.* The Special Group personnel (often enlarged) will function, as we said, as the racket section of the local prosecutor's office.

Each United States Attorney has been given a *Handbook for the Prosecution of Racketeers.* Specified in this *Handbook* are the ten laws considered most useful in dealing with racketeers. (Some racketeers, big business men—legitimately and otherwise, may for instance be violating the anti-trust laws . . .). The detailed analysis of these laws shows how they can be applied, what cases have been decided under them, how convictions were won—and lost, and the facts necessary to build an effective case.

the ghosts of suicide corner

by.. E. Phillips Oppenheim

The hooded crows of Corsica meant only one thing to the superstitious—and the desperate. In one word — Death.

THE leader of the orchestra, who was a person of much imagination, always declared that the descent upon the Café de Paris, during the sacred dinner hour of that strange flight of phantom birds, was heralded by portents of an unusual and dramatic nature. First of all, the wind, which, as though exhausted after a week of mistral, had shaken neither leaf nor bough of any tree from dawn till twilight, woke, and, as though in a hurry, brought a scurry of leaves underneath the tables of the café proper on to the dancing floor of the restaurant, where they lay like dead things until swept away. Afterwards, two of the roosting pigeons of the square, who might well have been sentinels of their dozing fellows, flew suddenly down from their shelter amongst the façades and spurious ornamentation of the Casino front, and drifted solemnly over the heads of the diners, uttering hoarse cries, as though they scented danger. Waiters paused in their hurrying to and fro, and stood with dishes in their hands, watching the curiously circling

E. P. Oppenheim wrote about a world, as we have said before, whose mores and whose manners had soft shadings—and nuances—difficult to still find in these more hurried decades. The loss is possibly ours, a subject which we may comment on, in "What's New in Crime," at some future date. But not now.

From: CROOKS IN THE SUNSHINE.
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birds. A wine waiter, who had been serving some priceless Burgundy, went on pouring it until the wine was trickling in a little stream across the tablecloth on to the floor. Suddenly the pigeons disappeared, not with any effort of slow and graceful flight, but apparently in a wild and panic-stricken swoop. There was a disturbed murmur amongst the crowd of diners.

"Never in my life," the manager declared, as he stood with his hands behind his back, gazing across the strip of garden, "have I seen those pigeons stir after they have once been to roost, till morning."

Nevertheless, the incident—although unusual—would speedily have been forgotten, except for what followed. Circling around the square, without formation, in ones and two, flying wearily and giving the impression of immense fatigue, came a flock of birds strange to Monte Carlo. They were, or seemed to be at some distance, jet-black. They crossed the corner of the grotesque building, spread out over the small tables where the loungers of the place were taking their coffee, and finally floated over the dancing floor of the space alotted to the dinner tables of the outdoor restaurant. For a moment every one was dazed. Then a woman shrieked, picked up her wrap and ran for the indoor portion of the building. Meanwhile, the birds, with incredible voracity, lit almost upon the dining tables, grubbed everywhere about the floor, scavenging, tearing to pieces with their yellow beaks everything that seemed like food. Two or three more women followed the first one, and the whole place seemed on the verge of a panic, when an old resident, who was being entertained by a Princess of the neighborhood, rose in his place.

"The birds are harmless," he called out. "They are the hooded crows of Corsica."

"Crows are not migratory birds," some one objected.

"Neither are these," was the response. "They were probably blown out to sea by the gale and landed upon a small steamer. There was one entering the harbour as I came up the hill."

The explanation satisfied the intelligence of every one. They started feeding the birds, and their male kind went in search of the deserting women. But it seemed as though intelligence was not the only one of the sensibilities which needed assuaging. There were perhaps sixty or seventy people dining in scattered groups and, amongst the majority at least, there remained something, if not of alarm, of superstitious depression. The birds strutted and hopped here and there, differing very slightly from the ordinary black crow of the fields, but carrying with them

an atmosphere of the unusual. It was as though they diffused everywhere a sense of uneasiness, against which the mind was powerless to cope.

Commodore Jasen, who was dining alone with Zoë, was one of the few who regarded the incident with indifference. He patted her hand when he became aware of her distress.

"My dear girl," he protested, "drink a glass of your wine. Our friend over there has given us what, I am convinced, is the correct explanation of the arrival of those birds."

A wild-looking young man at the next table was shouting to his companions. He was half in jest and half in earnest, but there were drops of unusual perspiration on his forehead.

"They came over Suicide Corner," he declared. "Look at the face of that old one there. If you look long enough, you can see it bent over the roulette tables. I'm off!"

He threw a note upon the table and rushed away without waiting for his hat or coat. It is hard to tell what might have followed, had the manager not saved the situation. He strode into the middle of the dancing floor, with the saxophone player on one side and the drummer on the other. Together the two musicians bent to their task. With a curious rustling of the wings, as though they rose lazily and unwillingly, the whole flock flew away almost within reach of the hands of the crowd over whom they passed. They made one circle and then flew steadily for the harbour.

"Gone to book their return passage," one humorist suggested.

"Thank God, they have gone!" Zoë declared fervently.

And there were a good many others who felt the same relief.

The evening, after a fashion, was re-established. From most tables a demand went out for more wine. The orchestra started one of their most popular dance tunes. Soon the floor was crowded. Commodore Jasen rose to his feet.

"We will dance this," he said to his companion. "Afterwards I shall be fatigued. I shall then send for our young friend and you will open up the business upon which we came."

The girl indulged in a characteristic grimace.

"I will do my best," she said, "only I wish that this had not happened. I am afraid."

"What is there in life to fear?" her companion asked, as they passed into the throng.

"It is not life of which I was thinking," she answered.

The orchestra played with furious spirit. Never had they worked so hard. They had almost the air of revivalist musicians, as

they sank exhausted over their instruments when the end came, and for a time they were indifferent to the vigorous clapping of hands. Commodore Jasen led his partner to her seat. He fanned himself with his handkerchief.

"A trifle too vigorous for me," he observed, as he recovered his breath. "Ah, I see one of the young professionals over there is free."

He beckoned to a pale-faced young man who was seated in a distant corner alone, and who, only a few minutes previously, had been one of the most alarmed of the spectators. Perhaps he had not yet fully recovered from the nervous shock, for he rose almost unwillingly to his feet and crossed the room towards his prospective clients. He bowed to Zoë and to the commodore as to strangers and they accepted his greeting in like fashion.

"My niece would like to dance," the Commodore told him. "I am myself a little fatigued."

Zoë surrendered herself to the young man's automatic gesture. Commodore Jasen lit a cigar and, leaning back in his chair, watched the dancing with bénevolent interest. The encore was not a long one, and on its conclusion the dancer brought his companion back to the table. Commodore Jasen fingered his pocketbook tentatively.

"You will be able to dance again with my niece, I hope," he demanded.

The young man hesitated.

"I am really engaged for the evening," he explained nervously, "to the lady who has been my patroness for the season. I ventured to dance with Mademoiselle, as she has scarcely commenced her dinner. She is with Princess Ostreville."

"I see," the Commodore murmured. "Nevertheless, I think if you make an effort—say in half an hour—your patroness will spare you a few minutes—just a few minutes for one more dance," he went on, "and perhaps a glass of wine."

His cold blue eyes were fixed, indifferently enough to all appearance, upon the young man's. The latter had the air of one receiving the sentence of death.

"I will explain to Madame," he said. "In half an hour—yes—I will return."

He bowed and hurried away. Commodore Jasen watched him thoughtfully. There was something furtive about the young man's progress. He seemed in a great hurry to return unmolested to his solitary table in his solitary corner.

"I sometimes ask myself," Commodore Jasen observed, almost under his breath, "why Michael was ever accepted, even in our lowest class. In New York he seemed to have plenty of nerve, though. Late hours, I sup-

pose: lack of real employment and this puppy-dog life have had their effect."

"What do you call lack of real employment for a professional dancer?" the girl asked him. "There is no one on the Riviera in more demand than Michael. They say that this Mrs. Hammond has had to pay high indeed for the right to control his movements."

Commodore Jasen stroked his moustache.

"When I said 'lack of work,'" he explained indulgently. "I meant *work*. Nothing to do, that, you know, with the avocation of a professional dancer. By real work I mean something entirely different."

"Has Michael ever done any 'real work' for you?" she enquired. "He does not seem to me to have the courage."

"He performed one mission in New York quite successfully," her companion told her. "He also carried out some very easy enquiry work here with success. At present, I admit, he seems an inefficient sort of person. Different kinds of enterprises, however, demand different qualities."

The girl toyed with a peach for several moments. She had the air of one very far from being at her ease.

"There is something you still wish to say to me?" the Commodore continued presently.

"If I might dare," she admitted. "You are dissatisfied with Michael, I know. So far he has failed in his project, and, as you often tell us, you have no place for failures. Even bearing that in mind, I think I would not press him too hard tonight."

"And why not?" was the smoothly asked question.

"Because," the girl confided, "ridiculous as it may seem to you, that poor young man is in a terrible state of nerves. I suppose it was seeing us here, and guessing that you have come to talk to him, and then—those birds. . . ."

"Ah," Commodore Jasen murmured. "Those birds!"

"I know that things like that mean nothing to you," she went on, "but I expect that he lives an althogether unhealthy life. I could feel his body tremble when he was dancing and, although he seemed all out of condition, his hands were as cold as ice. You can force a man into anything, of course, but I am not sure that anything he attempted tonight would be well done."

The Commodore looked at his companion speculatively.

"You have common sense," he approved. "You speak well enough from your point of view. The trouble is that you do not know mine. He does, and he knows that when he fails he disappears. Wonderful steadying effect that has upon any sort of a

creature with a spark of life still there! I ask myself why sometimes," Jasen went on with the air of one considering an abstruse point—"I ask myself why the ordinary human being clings so tenaciously to life. I have never found a satisfactory answer to the question and I daresay I never shall. But I think that to save his life, even that young man might get the better of a fit of nerves. You will take some coffee?"

"I will take some coffee," the girl agreed.

Presently Michael received a gracious signal from his patroness, and a few minutes later he was escorting on to the dancing floor a rather fat, elderly woman with a mass of too fair hair, a wickedly disported Chanel frock and a gorgeous necklace. Zoë watched her curiously.

"I wonder you don't make him go for the necklace," she observed.

"Too obvious, my dear," her companion sighed. "The loss of such a necklace would make even a woman like Mrs. Hammond vituperative. Besides, who else but a gigolo could steal jewellery from a woman like that? They would put him in prison before they began to look for it, and Michael in prison, with four walls safely around him, would be rather a dangerous proposition."

"He may very well find his way into prison on the present scheme," the girl reflected.

Commodore Jasen smiled.

"Not if I know anything of Mrs. Hammond," he said.

In about half-an-hour's time Mrs. Hammond, flushed and happy with dancing, and delighted with her dinner party, was in the humour to grant almost any request her cavalier could make to her. She listened to what he had to say as he held her chair, glanced across at the Commodore and Zoë, and nodded her consent. The young dancer returned to his table, where he helped himself liberally to the contents of a bottle in front of him, and when the music for the next dance commenced, he crossed the floor towards the table where Zoë and her escort were sitting.

"Not too long a dance," the Commodore enjoined, as they prepared to leave him. "Let us have time for a little conversation."

The young man shivered slightly and, as many other people had done that evening, he glanced towards the particular corner over the café from which those birds had first made their appearance.

"We will dance the first part only," he promised.

"Dance the second part," Jasen suddenly proposed. "I have friends here with whom I

might talk later. Sit down. *Maître d'hôtel,* another glass. Good. Now make your report."

The dreaded moment had come. Michael had not the least desire to drink, but he swallowed a glass of the wine which had been poured out.

"Everything has been done," he announced at last. "I have followed instructions carefully. But Commodore," he went on, leaning over the table, "I do not think—I honestly do not think that the scheme will work."

"And just why not?" was the cold demand.

"You do not understand Mrs. Hammond, sir," the young man continued eagerly. "I know she is fond of me up to a certain point. She would have been fond of any young man who danced with her and flattered her and played the rôle I have had to fill. But she has not a great deal of heart, really, and it is not a personal affection. It is just the getting what she wants. When it comes to my disgrace, or parting with a large sum of money, she will only laugh. She loves her money, sir."

"I have ascertained," the Commodore observed, "that she is worth a million pounds—that is fifty thousand a year. She may love her money, Michael, but she loves you a little, too. Yes?"

The world who saw that smile upon Jasen's lips might have thought it a pleasant gesture, but Zoë and the young man seated within a few feet of him knew better.

"Because she is rich," the latter went on, "it does not follow that she is not sometimes terribly mean. If we take a taxi, she won't let me give the man a reasonable tip. The servants at the hotel hate her. She gives nothing to the croupiers, however much she wins. Sometimes I am ashamed to pay the bills at the restaurants and I slip something of my own in with the change."

"What an unpleasant old lady!" the Commodore sighed. "However, it all fits in with my idea of her psychology. You often find a person who is mean in small things is a spendthrift in large ones. We are not trying her too high. We shall ask for only half a million. You should be worth that to her, Michael. You young men, unless you have some one of intelligence behind you, never know how to make use of your opportunities."

There was something hopeless about Commodore Jasen's tone —a note half of irony and yet with a background of unshakable determination. Michael recognised it, as many others in life had done before him.

"I think you are wrong, sir," he said, "but you are the master."

"The mistakes I have made in life," Jasen said, "have been very few. In this case, you need have no fear. I have watched Mrs.

Hammond. She is a foolish woman. She may need skilful handling, but I have the skill. I think I may say without boasting," he wound up, his voice seeming to wander out in little silver threads from his partially closed mouth, "that I have never failed to kill my man when killing has been necessary, and I have never failed to receive all that I asked in any case of barter."

The young man rose to his feet. He fingered his tie nervously and afterwards held out his arms. Zoë and he floated away amongst the throng. Commodore Jasen watched the lady whom they had been discussing.

"A common enough type out here," he reflected. "Wealthy, without social gifts or position—an easy prey for any adventurer."

He caught a glimpse of her sideways, as she leaned over to speak to her hostess, and for the first time he realised the one strong feature of her face—her jaw. Michael probably earned his money, he decided. For the young man's sake he rather regretted that jaw.

Zoë and her partner returned at the end of the encore. The latter accepted a glass of wine and sat with his back to the dancing floor. Very reluctantly he drew from his pocket two folded slips of paper and passed them across the table. Commodore Jasen studied them carefully and transferred them with dexterous fingers to his waistcoat pocket.

"Ridiculously easy," he murmured. "Your distressed appearance, my young friend," he went on, glancing at him keenly, "is perhaps so much to the good. Keep it up, but don't overdo it."

"When are you going to see Mrs. Hammond?" Michael asked fearfully.

"Tomorrow evening."

"I am supposed to be dining here with her—a quiet dinner," Michael volunteered. "I don't suppose she will come. I am more likely to receive a visit from the gendarmes."

Jasen smiled scornfully.

"There will be no gendarmes," he assured the dancer. "She may be angry, but you will probably know how to console her. An extra glass or two of champagne, your vows for the future, a little more *empressement* during the dance! There is nothing, I am sure, which I can teach you."

"You taught me something in New York I wish I had never learnt," was the bitter rejoinder. "You taught me to be dishonest."

The Commodore shook his head.

"My dear young man," he said, "you needed no lessons. Your environment here, your profession—well, they would neither of them entitle you to membership of the Y.M.C.A., would they? Now, try and throw

away that woebegone air for a time. Remember that you have a hundred thousand francs coming to you. My men do not work for nothing, as you know."

Michael rose to his feet. Curiously enough, he, like so many others that evening, glanced for the second or third time towards that corner of the café round which the flight of birds had circled.

"Still superstitious?" Jasen asked with faint sarcasm.

The young man shivered.

"I am not the only one who was scared tonight," he answered, as, with a bow to Zoë, he took his leave.

Mrs. Hammond received her visitor on the following evening affably and even with enthusiasm. She cut short his opening words.

"I know all about you, Commodore," she said. "You have that beautiful château at Antibes which belongs to Lord Somebody-or-other. I have seen you out there, bathing. I have seen you here too, often," she added, with a slight smile. "Once with that beautiful girl from the Cap, who was at the Opera the other night with the Marquis de St. Véran, and last night—with a very pretty little lady last night!"

The Commodore smiled.

"When one gets on in years as I, alas, have done," he confided, "one feels that one must take hold of one's opportunities. You are a widow, I believe, Mrs. Hammond. When you have reached my years of—indiscretion, I suppose you would say—you will realise that."

"No one would ever accuse you of not making the best of things," she declared. "Do make yourself comfortable in that easy-chair. The Princess was talking to me a great deal about you last night. She complains that you do not go to her parties as often as you used to. What about ringing for a waiter? It is almost cocktail time, isn't it?"

"You are very kind," the Commodore replied, "but I think not, if you will excuse me just at present. The fact of it is, Mrs. Hammond," he went on, "I am charmed with this opportunity of making your acquaintance, but I ought to tell you at once that my visit to you is not altogether on a pleasant subject."

"Hoity-toity!" the lady exclaimed. "What's all this about? What unpleasant subject can there be for us to discuss?"

"At any rate," her caller remarked, with a smile, "if the subject does turn out to be unpleasant—perhaps it won't—I may be completely mistaken—we will at least contrive to discuss it amiably."

"My dear man," the lady begged, "don't talk in riddles any longer for the sake of being

polite. I know who you are. I am very pleased to see you here and to add you to my list of acquaintances. I shall listen to everything you have to say with the utmost respect, because every one has such a high opinion of you. Let's get it over—the unpleasant part at any rate."

"The unpleasant part," Commodore Jasen admitted, "is connected with a young man who goes by the name of Michael, I believe. His name is really Michael Brennan. Mikkie he used to be called."

"Michael, my dancer at the Café de Paris!" Mrs. Hammond exclaimed. "The young man who was dancing with me last night and whom I saw at your table?"

"Precisely."

"What on earth can you have to say disagreeable about him?" she asked, with slightly heightened colour.

"About him personally—nothing," the Commodore replied. "I have known him for some years. I knew him in New York. He has always struck me as being a very well-behaved and well-brought-up young man. I have taken, in fact, quite an interest in him. I daresay though, even you — although a woman very seldom hears of these things —have an idea that he has been rather foolish lately?"

"I don't know what you are talking about," the lady rejoined. "I thought he seemed very queer last night, but he has Irish blood in him and those beastly birds had got on his nerves. Irish people are always superstitious, aren't they?"

"He was certainly upset," the Commodore agreed, "but I do not think it was altogether the birds. I understand that you and he have been quite friends, Mrs. Hammond. Why not? A very well-brought-up and well-behaved young man. Still, I should have thought that, seeing so much of him, you would have gathered that he has been in trouble lately."

"I know that he has been hard up," Mrs. Hammond admitted. "He told me so. He has had to sell his little car. I don't mind telling you, Commodore—you are a man of the world and a good sort—I gave him a cheque for fifty thousand francs to buy a new one.

"It is a good deal to give a dancer, I know," Mrs. Hammond went on. "But I believe in paying for the things you get in life. A woman in my position cannot go traipsing about into restaurants and dancing places by herself. I just send for Michael and go where I please and when I please. I have been thinking often that I really don't pay him enough. I ought to give him a salary. If I took a stuck-up young woman companion, who would not be a bit of use to me I would probably have to give her four or five hun-

dred a year, and that young man —who is jolly useful—I pay generously, of course, but it is practically only his dancing fees he gets from me."

"I am glad to hear you talk like this, Mrs. Hammond," her visitor said. "It shows me that I have to do with a sensible woman. I am afraid that what I have to say, however, will be a shock to you."

"Well, get on with it and don't talk so much, then," she said irritably. "Oh, I know you are trying to be very polite and nice and all that, but you are getting me worked up. If Michael's done anything wrong, I want to hear what it is."

"I am very much afraid," the Commodore told her, "that Michael has forged your name to a cheque for a much larger amount than fifty thousand francs."

"God bless my soul!" she gasped. "You don't mean that?"

"I do indeed," was the grave assent.

Mrs. Hammond, who had been lounging skittishly on the end of the sofa with a cigarette in her mouth, collapsed on to a chair and threw the cigarette into an ash tray. Some of her high colour had faded.

"Forged my name!" she repeated. "Michael! I cannot believe it. How do you come to be concerned in this, Commodore?"

"In this way," the latter explained. "As I told you, I knew the lad in New York, and I see him here every now and then. I am not like a great many people with a prejudice against professional dancers. I have always looked upon him as a decent young chap and I have had him over to swim and lunch and play a few sets of tennis more than once."

"Very nice of you too," the lady murmured. "I think I know a gentleman when I see one and I am not ashamed to take Michael anywhere."

"Quite right of you," Jasen approved warmly. "When he was over about a week ago, he showed me this cheque of yours for the car and asked me if I would kindly cash it."

"Why didn't he take it to the bank himself?" Mrs. Hammond demanded.

"Simply because," the other explained, "he is a little sensitive about money affairs, as you know. He banks at the same bank and they know that he is a professional dancer. I do not think he wanted to pay in a cheque from a client for that amount. He asked me if I would put it through my Paris bank—which I was very pleased to do."

"And you gave him the money?"

"And I gave him the money. But naturally that is not the transaction I have come to see you about."

"There is another cheque, you

say? Forged? Tell me about that."

"You must prepare yourself for something of a shock," the Commodore went on. "As I told you, I thought the young man looked very depressed last night. This morning, before ten o'clock, he was over at my place in a taxicab. He looked upon me as the oldest friend he had and he made—up to a certain point—a clean breast of it. He has been gambling, Mrs. Hammond. Evenings when you have not been dancing or wanted him, he has gone into Nice and stayed there, playing all night. He has been playing up at Beausoleil here too, and the fact of the matter is that he has lost a great deal of money. He has borrowed from every friend he has. The amount he owes me has nothing to do with the matter and I will not refer to it. I would have let it stand over as long as he had wished, but he is also in the hands of a lawyer money-lender in Nice, who threatens to sue him and send him to prison unless he pays. The long and short of it is that he brought me a cheque this morning—a cheque of yours—for five hundred thousand francs, and asked me to change it in the same way as I had done the other."

"A cheque of mine for five hundred thousand francs," the lady repeated in a stunned tone.

Commodore Jasen opened his pocketbook and produced it. She read it over, word by word, and gazed at her own signature as though stupefied.

"Amazing," she muttered. "I should have sworn that was my writing. I should never have believed that any one—much less Michael—could have imitated it like that."

She unlocked a drawer in a cupboard and drew out a cheque book. She looked back through the counterfoils.

"Yes," she admitted. "There was a loose cheque. I remember I took it with me to Juan-les-Pins the other night, in case I was short, and as I did not use it, I put it back in the cheque book. Go on, please.

"I went to my bank at Juan," the Commodore continued, "and I drew out five hundred thousand francs and gave them to Michael, who was with me. I took him back to lunch at the Château and I cross-questioned him closely about your cheque. I cannot say I have ever had a single suspicion about the boy, but I did not feel like paying that cheque in, and as I happened to have plenty of money there, I didn't. As you see, I have kept it, although I have given him the money for it. After lunch, we went together to Nice, and I personally saw him pay off the amounts he owed. Then I brought him on to Monte Carlo, although I did not intend to come in again so soon, and on the way he broke down. I tried to cheer him up, but it could not be done.

'You ought to be thankful,' I told him, 'that you have such a wonderful friend, and that now you owe nobody in the world anything except her.' I can assure you, Mrs. Hammond, although I am a hard man, I was sorry for him at that moment. He burst into tears.

" 'Yes,' he confessed, 'Mrs. Hammond has been the best friend I ever had.'

"He even went so far as to tell me that he cared for you more than any one else in the world; and then he took my breath away. He confessed that he had forged your name to the cheque."

"That cheque which you have in your pocketbook?" she faltered.

The Commodore nodded.

"I know what you are thinking," he sighed. "I have parted with my five hundred thousand francs and all I have is this forged cheque."

"What are you going to do?" she asked.

"There is only one thing I can do," he replied. "I am a wealthy man in a way, but I cannot possibly afford to lose five hundred thousand francs. I shall present the cheque in the hope that he has taken sudden leave of his senses and that you really did give it to him. If the bank refuses to pay it, Michael must take the consequences. I am fond of the lad, but I am not a philanthropist to that extent."

Mrs. Hammond sat quite quiet for several minutes and, something of a physiognomist as he certainly was, Commodore Jasen could only speculate as to the nature of her thoughts. Presently she looked across at him. Her manner had lost something of its decision and her jaw was less prominent.

"You were telling me what he said to you about me," she began hesitatingly.

"To me that makes the situation even sadder," the Commodore replied, with a very convincing sigh. "The lad is evidently terribly attached to you. He seems to have had no other affairs whatever. Every penny of his money has gone in gambling. There is no doubt whatever about his affection for you."

Mrs. Hammond rose abruptly to her feet.

"I see that you have already changed for dinner, Commodore," she said. "Will you do me a kindness? Wait here for me half an hour whilst my maid puts my things on, and escort me to the Café de Paris, where I promised to meet Michael. I will make up my mind what I shall do before I come down and we can see him together."

"I will wait for you with pleasure," the Commodore promised.

At ten minutes to eight Mrs. Hammond reappeared. She was dressed in black and was followed by a maid, carrying the

usual collection of trifles. She dismissed the latter at once and opened her bag.

"Commodore Jasen," she said, "you wish to save Michael, I suppose?"

"I certainly do, so far as I am concerned," he assured her.

"Very well, then," she decided. "I have made up my mind to forgive him. If you will hand me over that cheque," she went on, bringing out a great bundle of notes from her case, "I will give you three hundred thousand francs in bank notes, and a draft on New York payable to me, and which I have endorsed, for five thousand dollars. I shall still owe you a little money, and as soon as you can work out how much it is, I will give you a cheque. Is that satisfactory to you?"

"Absolutely," the Commodore assented.

He drew the cheque from his pocketbook and passed it over to his companion. She occupied herself tearing it into small pieces, whilst the Commodore filled his pockets with the notes.

"Come along," she invited. "We will walk over to the Café de Paris. The sooner we let Michael know that everything is well the better."

The Commodore was a graceful and willing cavalier. As they crossed the square he touched her arm.

"Mrs. Hammond," he said, "I offer you my congratulations. You have done a very fine thing in a very fine way. You have certainly made the young man your slave for ever."

She was a woman in whose face there was seldom any marked expression, but at that moment it seemed to him that her lips twitched and there was certainly a very soft light in her eyes. She quickened her pace. Just as they began to pass through the little network of tables, however, their way was blocked. People were all rising to their feet and gazing to the far end of the café, exactly as they had peered the night before. The black crows of Corsica were once more in evidence. They passed over the heads of Mrs. Hammond and Commodore Jasen, and once more they found a scattered resting place amongst the tables of the outdoor restaurant and on the dancing floor. Mrs. Hammond shivered as she heard the fluttering of their wings.

"How I hate those birds!" she exclaimed. "There was one actually sat for a moment on our table last night and looked at us. I felt as though what that man was saying was the truth—that they had come from Suicide Corner and were all the black spirits of the place. What was that?"

"Some one dropped something, I think," the Commodore replied nonchalantly.

His companion quickened her pace. They reached the enclosure

but there was no welcoming *maître d'hôtel* to greet them. Every one seemed to be crowding round the table where Michael usually sat. By chance the crowd parted for a moment. They saw the young man sprawling forward, his hands hanging helplessly by his side, the revolver still smoking two feet away upon the pavement. On the table in front of him, undisturbed even by the report, one of the oldest and wickedest-looking of the birds had alighted, and was perched, with its beak half open, and the light of all the evil in the world shining out of his angry eyes.

"He was afraid," the lady sobbed, as Commodore Jasen escorted her back to the hotel half an hour later, "that I should never forgive him! If only he had waited!"

"At any rate," her companion reminded her piously, as he felt his pockets, "it would be, I am sure, some consolation to him to know that his debts are all paid."

MUSIC HATH CHARMS

A NUMBER OF YEARS AGO, an agent, looking for a young mountaineer, found himself in a lonely wooded section of the Tennessee mountains, miles from nowheres, entering the young man's home. High-powered rifles leaned against the wall. Angular men sprawled about, eyes intent on him, as he calmly admitted that he was a government man and—yes—he'd come to get the son in the house.

An old man rose to his feet, eyes gleaming. "You ain't goin' to take him—you nor any other dam govvament man!"

A second mountaineer reached for his gun.

"You say your son isn't here?"

"He ain't!"

All right, then the agent would leave—but he found out he wasn't allowed to. He stood there for a while, wondering what to do next, and then asked whether he could look at the fiddle on the mantel. He used to play in an orchestra, he said. Nobody protested, and he began to play—first "Turkey in the Straw"—to dead silence. Then "Arkansas Traveler"—there was a slight stirring. Then "Pop Goes the Weasel." Somebody over in the corner agreed, spitting carefully, that the playing was "danged good". And the agent smiled, very, very slightly, and swung into "Carry Me Back to Ole Virginny" . . .

He left the next morning, full of good mountain food and—oh, well. The father walked him a way. Perhaps the agent was right, he said. Maybe it wouldn't do the boy any good to keep on hiding like this.

The young man surrendered.

the sergeant and the skunks

by . . . Clifford Knight

"Preaching Annie" could be difficult, it was true, but she was a good woman and didn't deserve to be "took."

SERGEANT HORATIO TEWKS was a large man of dark complexion. Women held him in respect; small children took him at once into their confidence. The sergeant was a member of the bunco squad. At the moment he was troubled with skunks. They were eating his bees. While he would be the last to deny that skunks must live, he didn't want them to come knocking on his bee hives at night. For knocking brought the hive guards buzzing out to investigate, whereupon they were promptly seized and rolled in the grass and then eaten. The little smoothed places in front of his hives were the tipoff to the discerning beekeeper.

Being of reflective mind Sergeant Tewks thought how like it was in general to certain matters that came to the attention of the bunco division. He thought of this while driving in from his home in the foothills to which in time he expected to retire and care for his bees. Human skunks came knocking at the hives of upright men and women and in a fashion rolled them of the fruits of their labor.

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A delegation was awaiting the sergeant when he sat down at his desk that morning at headquarters. A beady-eyed gentleman of middle age and the physical proportions of an over-weight jockey, was the spokesman. There was about him the aura of one long sustained by the warmth and radiance of the wine bottle.

"Annie's been took," he said without preamble.

"Annie who?" inquired Sergeant Tewks.

"Preachin' Annie."

"Oh."

Sergeant Tewks observed without comment that Annie was not among the delegation which consisted of one other gentleman, obviously a senior citizen, and two women of approaching elderliness but with bright and cheerful faces. Tewks, however, had no difficulty recalling Preachin' Annie. When she was going good her voice could be heard all over the park, even above the noise of traffic right in the heart of downtown Los Angeles. Time was, before the sergeant was assigned to bunco, that he had had occasion to ask Preachin' Annie not to preach so loudly. She had always come back with the unanswerable observation, "You can lead some with a gentle voice, but it's the guy way out there on the fringe who has to be scared to God. And I'm gonna scare him. I'm gonna make him hear." The then Patrolman Tewks was not one to come between the shepherd and the sheep, however heedless the latter might be.

"Took?" the sergeant now said. "Took for what? She hasn't got anything to be took."

"That's where you're wrong, Sergeant. They took her for six grand." The spokesman's voice seemed to vibrate with indignation at such a monstrous wrong. Even so the sergeant had the unworthy thought that the ex-jockey possibly resented the fact that "they" had took Annie before he could do so himself.

"Where is Annie? Why doesn't she come herself and make a complaint?"

"Well—she's bashful." The spokesman searched for the word. "Maybe not bashful—reticent." He glowed slightly at achieving such exactitude.

"When was this? And where?"

"Yesterday afternoon. In the park."

"Now, you're not going to tell me—" The sergeant didn't finish, because the spokesman rushed in to confirm his fears.

"It was the pigeon drop," he said.

Sergeant Tewks struck his forehead in a dramatic gesture of despairing unbelief. The oldest, the hoariest trick in the confidence racket and Preachin' Annie had fallen for it!

"I can't believe it."

"She ain't smart," said one of the ladies of the delegation as if

in defense of Annie. "Honest, not really smart. It ain't ever'body who can stand havin' six grand. It does something to their mind."

Sergeant Tewks would go along with that. In his own case it would work wonders for his peace of mind. For that sum would just pay off the mortgage on his place in the foothills. Thoughts like this of home reminded him, of course, that the skunks were eating his bees. And he slapped his hand on his desk harder than he needed to and said, "All right. Thanks for coming in. Tell Annie I want to see her." He took down the names his callers gave him and the address, just as a routine matter, and they parted with renewed expressions of mutual appreciation for services rendered.

Annie didn't come in that morning, so Sergeant Tewks, by afternoon, having cleaned his desk of paper work attendant upon the windup of a fake charity racket, went to the park where Preachin' Annie was most likely to be found.

She wasn't there.

That Preachin' Annie could have had the not inconsiderable sum of six grand was still a doubt in his mind. So he strolled across the street to the bank, which could be seen from the park and which was the most obvious place for Annie to have had her money —if she had it. It was just a thought.

Another thought, too, was that there he'd find Dawson Grimes behind a very large desk. Grimes was a neighbor in a way. He lived on a big, expensive estate further up the wash from Sergeant Tewk's modest place. But once in an hour of peril, when brushfires were burning on the hillsides and their homes were endangered, they had met and become favorably known to each other. A common interest in bees had held them together.

They now shook hands across the big desk.

Greetings over, Sergeant Tewks ventured skunks as a topic. In connection with bees, of course, and while as neighbors whose properties backed up to Pickens Wash along which skunks—that is, of the weasel family—were wont to roam, there was still the kind of skunk who had took Preachin' Annie. Did Dawson Grimes know Annie?

"Lord, yes," exclaimed the banker.

"I've come to the point," said the sergeant. By any chance, he now inquired, did Annie ever have as much as six grand in this particular bank in which they were now sitting. The sergeant was the law asking a proper question in the investigation of an alleged crime.

"She did."

"Oh! Then she did! Did you know she'd been took for it?"

"Took?"

"The old pigeon drop, believe it or not."

"Well—" The banker spoke into an intercom, and presently a young woman came with Annie Marker's statement. A single deposit. A single withdrawal. A canceled counter check made out to cash for six thousand dollars. Signed by Annie Marker. "She had it a week and then she drew it out." Dawson Grimes brought his hands together, fingers tip to tip, and added, "It was gambling money."

"Gambling?"

"The late, and somewhat lamented Carmine Martuzzi—the gambler, that is—left it to Annie in his will. It was handled by our trust department. I remember the words of the bequest: 'To Annie Marker, whose work for the Lord probably will not otherwise be recognized here on earth, I give, devise and bequeath—' Rather touching, I thought."

"Remarkable," said Sergeant Tewks.

"The fact went unnoticed by the press largely, I think," opined Dawson Grimes, "because Carmine Martuzzi was not his legal name. Legally he was William Henry Loveless. And under that name he made his will."

Later when Sergeant Tewks returned to the park, still in search of Annie, the thing remained remarkable. And it really was. He didn't know that the late Carmine Martuzzi had had that side to his nature. He hadn't known that Martuzzi was an alias. Martuzzi while still alive had taken up more than his share of the time of the police department and the courts, and he had lived occasionally on the bounty of the taxpayers in idleness in the state's penal institutions. And so now his money, after its brief sojourn in the possession of Preachin' Annie, had passed once more into the dark and devious world which had been the gambler's.

He found Annie. She was sitting in the shade of a clump of banana trees, on a hard bench, her small sharp eyes in her dark face sizing up the loafers in the park.

"Oh, it's you," she said without enthusiasm, but without rancor, when the sergeant sat down beside her.

"What's this I've been hearing about you, Annie?" he asked.

"Well—they took me—proper."

"So your friends told me."

"Friends?"

"I see—"

"She found the money right there in that trash can," said Annie, pointing to the neat metal receptacle where the old residents of the park benches were wont to poke around for discarded newspapers and what not. "I saw her with my own eyes. And was she surprised!"

"Now, this was the woman who helped take you?"

"Yes."

"And if you would put up a like amount to show faith, then you'd get your cut out of it."

"Yes," said Annie, astonished the sergeant should know this.

"And then another woman had horned in by this time and all three of you went over to the bank and you drew out the six grand. And then you came back here to the park where before your very eyes they wrapped both your money and the found-money in a newspaper, and the two of them went away to get the third woman's money, so she could show faith and get her cut, leaving you holding the package. And after a while you peeked and all there was in it was a packet of newspapers cut like folding money."

"Yes," said Annie simply, "that's it."

"Annie," said the sergeant, "the woman hadn't really found any money in the trash can. It was her roll which she pretended to have found. But the point is your sin betrayed you—"

"My sin!"

Sergeant Tewks said gently, "Greed, Annie; greed is a sin and it betrayed you. You had a lot but you wanted more."

"But I was only doin' it for the Lord. I was gonna purify what Bill Loveless left me. And if I could just add to it maybe I could start a little mission of my own—"

"Yes, I know, Annie," he pointed out. "But you can't do that now unless you get your money back. Let's go down to headquarters and look at the pictures."

Preachin' Annie described the tricksters as they went along to headquarters, but her description would fit ten thousand women. She'd know them, though, if she ever saw them again; sure.

The project at headquarters was unsuccessful. No face in the large photographic collection of grafters, gentle or otherwise, was familiar to Annie. Sergeant Tewks at last said he was afraid the bunco division could be of little help to her. And he watched a sad little woman walk out of headquarters, her dreams shattered. When would they ever learn? His patience with these gullible people was all but gone. They didn't deserve money if they couldn't hold onto it. That probably would be the last of Preachin' Annie's case. Oh, they'd keep the file open, of course, but what was there to work on?

So, at quitting time, taking none of the day's troubles with him, as was his custom, Sergeant Tewks went home to the foothills, and a dreadful night.

It was the skunks and the bees. The time had come to set the coyote trap among the hives. He

attached a long length of clothes line to it, just in case, and tied the free end to a sapling. Then he went into the house and ate a fine dinner. The evening was a luxury of reading the sports news and watching television. He had put on the new leisure shirt which Myrtle, his wife, had given him for his birthday, and his new slacks and the nice brown moccasins.

It was nearly twelve o'clock when he laid aside his paper, took up his flashlight, his heavy police revolver and went out into the moonless night. He called out to Myrtle, "Keep Bounce inside." For this was no affair of the brave young cocker. There was no telltale odor upon the air, but being experienced the sergeant knew that a skunk did not regard a trap as an enemy even though its cruel jaws might have snapped about a leg.

His flashlight beam fell upon the black furry ball crouched upon the trap before the hive at the end of the row. The sergeant untied the line from the sapling and was about to begin the careful maneuvering of his captive toward its doom in the wash, his torch playing upon the skunk.

Things happen sometimes with the terrifying suddenness of an explosion. It was so at this moment. Bounce had escaped the house and now came charging up with furious energy, total inexperience, and complete canine dedication to the cause of his good master. Loyal and steadfast, it was for him to afford protection —as the old English prayer has it—from the things that go woof in the night. Although in this instance whiff would seem the better term.

Sergeant Tewks yelled. Bounce snarled and flung himself upon the enemy. The skunk did as skunks do in such dire moments. Sergeant Tewks, holding fast to the line, ran one way around the hive, the skunk and Bounce the other, and between them they tipped the hive over. Whereupon the hum of insect wings soon became a great and ominous sound upon the fetid air.

Bounce was gasping and snorting and rolling in the grass. Sergeant Tewks shot the skunk where it rested beside the overturned hive and the explosion was like a sonic boom on the still night air. Tewks ran then, because angry bees somehow can find one in the dark. One bee did; in his left shoulder. He tripped and fell and then a frantic, odorous, whimpering animal swarmed over him, rubbing his clothes with its saturated fur.

"Bounce!" he yelled, and cast his dog away. Bounce yipped twice as bees spurred him and then he took off into the night.

Later, after exasperating search, Sergeant Tewks at the back porch, holding a contrite

and stricken cocker by the collar, called from the darkness. "Myrtle! Oh, Myrtle—Will you set out Bounce's bathtub, and open a couple of big cans of tomato juice."

Sometime later Bounce had been washed clean of the horrible odor and shoved into the house; then the sergeant trudged to the far end of the backyard and down into the sandy wash, and with a spade buried the new leisure shirt, the slacks and the brown moccasins, as well as other garments—and the skunk. And then as unclad as was Adam before the Fall, he slipped into his house and took over the spare bedroom for the night.

Disgust in floods swept over him as he lay long awake in the darkness. Myrtle had assured him that there no longer was any odor clinging to him. But his olfactory nerves must have been reconditioned by the experience, for he could still smell it.

What a terrible thing, though, for Bounce! Innocent until now of the hazards of life, believing in the goodness of gentle sunlight and soft breezes, of deep grass, of friendly pats on the head, of the bounty of the hand that fed—and then this rude shock.

Somehow Sergeant Tewks thought, too, of Preachin' Annie. The small figure in the dowdy dress, dentures worn down until her lips were only a grim line in her dark face. Blue-black hair, now sprinkled with gray, with ends forever escaping their pins. A strong voice earnestly calling out to her fellow man to repent his sins and get right with God.

The skunks who had taken her for six grand had shattered her dream world just as the skunk in the backyard had shattered Bounce's. He couldn't do anything for Bounce, probably. As a dog he'd have to learn to live with life. Tonight he'd had his first lesson.

But six grand and the hope of founding a mission. And the abiding faith that life could be made better for those drifting souls in the lonely world of a big city.

A feeling of shame came over Sergeant Tewks. It seemed to burn deep down into him. Only last evening he had dismissed Preachin' Annie and her troubles as a routine case that probably would not be solved. He'd had the ungracious thought that gullible people like her who couldn't hold onto money ought not have any. This shouldn't be. He thereupon made a resolution and only then went to sleep.

Come morning he discovered that a minor fear was well founded in that the bees of the hive involved in last night's disaster had vanished; they had not settled anywhere that he could discover and so were lost to him. Bounce was subdued, gone was the usual morning joy at sight of his

master. The cocker even seemed apologetic for the havoc he had wrought, for his tail wagged only faintly when he was spoken to, and he looked away as if painfully conscious of his lost dignity.

So Horatio Tewks kissed Myrtle goodbye and drove into the city with a firm resolution to get back Preachin' Annie's six grand from the skunks who took her.

Certain facts were apparent in the case. Annie had been unable to identify anyone from the bureau's collection of known women workers in the confidence racket. It was a comprehensive file too. This suggested newcomers to the local vineyard, possibly from upstate or out of state. But it wouldn't pan out. For what stranger would know, or even suspect on seeing Annie the first time, that she was possessed of six grand? Certainly none just come to town. Certainly, too, no one who had idled in the park long enough to hear Annie preach and realize that her kind was of the church-mouse poor.

Captain Roseborough of the bunco division called across to Sergeant Tewks who was sitting hunched and seemingly idle at his desk. "What are you doing Tewks?"

"Thinking," was the slow reply. Then he asked, "Do you know if Carmine Martuzzi had any friends?"

"What do you mean friends?"

"People who knew that his real name was William Henry Loveless."

"That's news to me."

"I guess I'll go ask somebody else." The sergeant got up and walked out.

He went first to the probate court to read the will of the late Mr. Loveless. There was no other person than Annie Marker nominated in it for his largesse. There was this curious last bequest: "All the rest, residue and remainder of my estate, but not to exceed the sum of ten cents, I give toward the founding of a home for reformed gamblers."

Cynical fellow, thought the sergeant. Surely a disillusioned humorist, if not an embittered man. There was no residue; it had been a tight squeeze to get Annie's six grand out of the assets. Such a fellow must have had a sour eye for his fellow man, and therefore had no friends; and maybe—in fact it seemed clear that he probably was one of those guys lurking out on the fringe of Annie's open air congregation in the park, who needs must be sacred to God. And Annie's bequest was testimony to the fact, a timid acknowledgment of a misspent life, a gesture at repentance.

It was to be kept in mind that Carmine Martuzzi had met his death, in the words of the coroner's jury, "at the hands of a person or persons unknown." The method had been by gunshot,

the place an empty downtown parking lot in the small hours of the night. The time now more than six months ago. Case as yet unsolved.

Sergeant Tewks went back to the new and rather palatial building occupied by the department of police, and walked down a corridor until he came to a room reserved for the press, and which was occupied at the moment by several gentlemen who waited for something to happen, but who hoped it wouldn't, because it disturbed their pastimes.

"George," said Tewks to one whom he singled out and led to a corner, "What do you know about Carmine Martuzzi?"

"Nothing new on the case, Horatio. Why?" George was very young, very much in the groove of his profession. Crew cut, too.

"Did he have any friends?"

"Friends? Don't make me laugh. Why?"

"You guys down here missed the story."

"Tell me." George was alert, eager.

"Not yet."

"Be a sport, Horatio." He was whispering now. "Tell me."

"It's too soon. You knew Martuzzi better than these other reporters did; I want to know about his friends."

"I'll find out. You'll give me the story?"

They made a bargain, and the sergeant returned to his office.

Back at his desk he noted with pleasure that his olfactory nerves had returned to normal. As a matter of fact, they had been that way ever since he left home after breakfast and he'd been too absorbed in his thinking to notice it. He perhaps wouldn't have thought of it except that the Preachin' Annie case had now acquired an odor. He could anticipate what George would discover for him.

The theory the sergeant had evolved was simple. Somebody calling himself—herself—friend to Martuzzi had known his real name. This person must be assumed to have known or suspected his financial rating; this person most likely had indulged in that most wishful of all thinking, the inheritance of money. Also there must be knowledge of testamentary matters to the extent of examining the will filed in probate court. This theoretical person having thus determined that Martuzzi's money had gone to Preachin' Annie, instead of himself, had devised the scheme to trick her out of it.

Tewks of a sudden realized that he had overlooked a point. He went at once back to the probate court and inquired of the clerk in charge of the files if she could remember the person or persons besides himself who had asked to see the will.

She couldn't remember, even though she screwed up her bright

blue eyes and tapped her pencil in exasperation on the counter between them. "Gosh, it seems as though I ought to, Sergeant. But I just don't. Somebody must have. If I can think of it, I'll call you."

She called almost as soon as the sergeant got back to his office. She remembered a little guy. He'd been there last week. Short and kind of pudgy, and he had funny, shifty eyes. Didn't get his name. Said he was a friend of Loveless.

Sergeant Tewks thanked her and then when she hung up, George Mercer, the reporter, called. He reported: "Horatio, it's like I said, this fellow Martuzzi didn't have any friends. People went to the funeral of course; some of the boys from Homicide, and then some others who just wanted to be sure he was dead. But not friends, I understand. Oh—except for a character they call Preachin' Annie—know her. She got up and said a few words over the body. And that was that. There was a guy—an ex-jockey name of Joe—Joe—something. He and Martuzzi several years ago got out a little tip sheet they peddled until the cops got 'em. They went around together for a while like friends. Joe—Joe Wake—something or other."

"Wakeroot," said Tewks, consulting a slip on his desk.

"Yeah—that's it. Didn't think you knew him. That's all I got, Horatio. This Joe, they tell me, hasn't been around town for a long time.""

"Thanks, George—"

"Now, what's the story?"

"Oh, no! Not yet. But you'll get it, don't worry."

Sergeant Tewks hung up. He thought he'd better go find Joe Wakeroot.

The address was on Bunker Hill. Not the historic hill of the Revolution, but a namesake almost in the lap of downtown Los Angeles. Once the well-to-do and the prominent had lived here, but long since they had moved away and their homes became old and shabby.

An odd aspect was now apparent in the case. Tewks thought about it as he went along toward the address. Joe Wakeroot had been an associate of sorts of the late Carmine Martuzzi. Perhaps a buddy. He had known that the name Martuzzi was an alias, for he had asked to see the will of the late Mr. Loveless. He might logically, therefore, he suspected of designs on Preachin' Annie's six grand. But, instead, he had come as the leader of a delegation and with fitting indignation had reported the taking of Annie. He consequently could not have had a finger in the actual job. The ex-jockey, whatever his plans may have been, was a doubtful suspect.

So his theory that the person

who had read the will would be a suspect, had now blown up. His mission to Bunker Hill, therefore, might very well be fruitless. But having set out upon it he would see it through.

He went up the wide wooden steps to an old mansion which had an ugly addition built at the rear. A sign outside the front door said "Vacancy." Another "Rooms to rent." Still another "Walk in."

Sergeant Tewks walked in. There was a counter across a small alcove, and behind it a rack for mail and keys. But there was nobody to answer questions. For a large man the sergeant walked softly; his movements were quiet, although not slow; his eyes were quick to size up a situation. For a moment his gaze was caught by the grand staircase. It soared upward in a graceful curve. A threadbare red carpet on the mahogany steps was an echo of past elegance.

But Tewks had eyes only for the small man on the stairs. He was more than half way up, mounting stealthily as if with sinister purposes. He carried a revolver. There was about him in the thrust of his head, the hunch of his shoulders, an appalling sense of evil. Murder cried on in the stillness.

The sergeant stood motionless until the man reached the second floor and disappeared down the hall. Then he acted. He went up the stairs two steps at a time in pursuit of Joe Wakeroot.

Down the hall as the sergeant reached the second floor, a man's leg disappeared at a doorway, and the light from the room he had entered was shut off from the dim hallway. Sergeant Tewks closed in within seconds, seized the knob and pushed the door inward. At that moment there was the roar of an exploding revolver within the room. The sergeant had his own gun out.

Even so, crowding out all else in a brief flash, there came to mind the absurd, brave action of Bounce last midnight when he flung himself upon the trapped skunk. Perhaps he was sticking his neck out now—

That was exactly it. Revolver in hand he shoved his way inside only to have his weapon knocked from his grasp, and he now stood, back to the door, covered by the gun held by the small man.

A heavy silence was upon the room; the smell of burnt powder stung the throat. Nobody spoke. A woman coughed. As he looked steadily at the gunman, wondering if there were a judo trick he could employ with safety in disarming him, he could see the murderous rage receding in the round small face. Of a sudden Joe put the gun down on the chiffonier at his elbow.

"My mistake," he said. "Nothing personal, Sergeant."

The sergeant stooped and picked up his revolver and put it back in his shoulder holster. His fingers were still numb from the blow. He reached for the other gun on the chiffonier and put it in his pocket.

"Who got shot?" he asked.

"Harry." One of the women spoke up, pointing to a man who sat on the floor, his back to the bed. He was holding his ear. A little blood was oozing through his fingers. The sergeant recognized the man. He was Harry Hope, the mild, quiet, unassuming senior citizen of the delegation that had come to acquaint him of the taking of Preachin' Annie.

Sergeant Tewks went to him, pulled away the hand and examined the wound. "You're lucky," he said. "Just a nick." He straightened up. For the first time he could survey the room in detail. There were women present —the pair who had come as members of the delegation. "What's this?" Preachin' Annie sat grimly on a chair, her hands behind her back. He reached down to untie her wrists. Even more surprising to the sergeant, whose eyes now saw it for the first time, was the large amount of money lying on the bed.

"What gives?" demanded Tewks severely. "Who's talking?" He looked about the circle of faces all solemnly silent. "Annie, tell me."

"They're the ones who took me," said Annie, pointing to the two women who sat on chairs across the room.

"Mrs. Samson and Miss Ruble," said Tewks, recalling the names on the slip of paper on his desk blotter.

"I followed her," said Annie, pointing to the latter. "I took a walk around up here on Bunker Hill just in case I'd see 'em, and here she was just goin' up the steps from the sidewalk. I followed her right up here to get my money back."

"That's a beginning," said Tewks, "What else?"

"They told me to drop dead."

The sergeant made a gesture toward the money on the bed. He was a long way from the bottom of the story, for which he was going to have to dig. "But there it is," he said. "How much is there?" Nobody spoke until Annie broke the silence.

"My six grand," she said. "The got it out and waved it in my face and said for me to drop dead."

"Well? Who next? Who's talking?"

Harry Hope, who was holding his ear took away his hand and examined the blood stains, then put it back, but he said nothing.

Tewks looked at Miss Ruble, for she seemed ready to cave in. He raised his eyebrows, and Miss Ruble said, "Sister and I haven't worked for years. Honest. This is

the first time in a long, long time we've pulled anything."

"You took Annie with a pigeon drop?" inquired the sergeant.

There was no reply, other than a broad and knowing smile.

The sergeant realized that the room in which this scene was laid was the room under rental to the two women. He went over to the closet. Inside on the floor were two suitcases. He hefted them, then went back to his place near the door.

"All ready to blow?"

"Another ten minutes and we'd been gone," said Mrs. Samson. "But this old gal—" referring to Preachin' Annie, "come bustin' in yellin'. And on her heels was that—" and she pointed with feeling at Joe Wakeroot, who rolled his eyes and said nothing.

"How did he get into the act?"

"He wanted a cut." Mrs. Samson was growing loquacious. "We were only going to cut it three ways. Harry was in because he bankrolled us. We had to have something to flash on her, see? But we had to push Joe out of the room, and he got mad. We didn't know he'd come back with his gun."

"I see. Joe—?"

The small man remained silent.

"I'll tell you," said Harry Hope, speaking up brightly. "He was planning it for himself. But the girls were too smart for him."

"Now, tell me," said Sergeant Tewks, "how did you know—" and he addressed the two women —"that Annie had six grand?"

"She told us—she told the world."

"Annie, how about it?"

"Sure, I told the world," answered the woman preacher. "One night in the park. I told everybody within the sound of my voice that I had six grand. I told 'em it came from a gambler who wanted to get right with God. I told 'em I was gonna purify it by startin' a mission. And I praised Carmine Martuzzi. I said if there was any more like him, I and the Lord would be glad to have them kick in. Sure, I didn't have anything to be ashamed of; I wanted everybody to know."

"I get it," said the sergeant. He was embarrassed he hadn't thought of this explanation before. He hadn't thought even to question Annie about it. "But tell me—and this I don't understand—why did you all come to tell me that Annie had been took —sticking your necks out?"

"Well—you see, sir," said Harry Hope, "the rumble started that she'd been took. Joe here accused the girls and when they said they hadn't done it, he said the only way he'd believe it was for us three to go down with him to bunco and report it. That's what we did."

"I see." But there was still a

point or two not clear, and so the sergeant asked, "How come Joe horned in on you?" He turned to the little man. "Why did you come in here just now?"

Joe shook his head. Preachin' Annie spoke up. "He must have heard me in here hollerin' for my money. I can talk loud. I preach."

"Yes, I know," said Tewks.

"He came in after I started yellin'. The money was on the bed. Then they tied me up. They gagged me for a while till they could decide who got my money."

The sergeant still was troubled by the fact that Joe Wakeroot had gone to probate court to read the Loveless will. How did that fit in? He was about to speak when Harry Hope interrupted.

"Now, I'll tell you something, Sergeant, which the police would like to know."

"Tell me first, though, why Joe took a pot shot at you."

Joe stiffened as if preparing himself for a shock.

"That's what I'm goin' to tell you. When the girls pushed him out, I said something, I guess, that scared him—about a rumble that comes pretty straight. I said if he didn't keep his nose out of our business I was going to the police about it. And then here he comes back with his gun and without a word throws down on me and blooie! I almost get it." His voice quavered slightly with the recollection of how close it was.

"But—tell me," urged the sergeant.

"Well, the rumble—and, incidentally, he never was a jockey. He never rode a horse in all his life." He pointed a mean and accusing finger at Joe Wakeroot. "They say," and he paused for emphasis, "they say he's the man who killed Martuzzi."

In the long silence that followed the sergeant looked steadily at the little man. At last he said, "Talking, Joe?"

Joe shook his head.

"You've got his gun," said Harry Hope. "Ballistics will prove it."

"Annie," said the sergeant without taking his eyes off the accused man now, "you'll have to go downstairs for me to a telephone. Call headquarters. Tell 'em Sergeant Tewks wants the wagon here. We're all going to take a ride."

For a moment Annie didn't move. She was looking with longing at the money on the bed. Tewks added, "Don't worry about your money. You'll get it back, I'll guarantee. It goes to headquarters with us."

Sergeant Tewks went home that night to the foothills. He was pleased with the day's work. George Mercer had the story that had been promised. Johnny Bronson in the police lab had said, "It's the gun that killed Martuzzi all right, Horatio, but we want one more check on it."

Bounce was delighted to see his master, enthusiastic. Tewks changed to his old slacks and sports shirt and just then the phone rang and Myrtle who answered it called out.

"It's Mr. Grimes."

The sergeant was glad to hear his neighbor's voice. It seemed that Dawson Grimes had acquired by migration a strange swarm of bees. Horatio Tewks told him of his lost swarm.

"You want to come up for it now, Horatio?"

"Sure."

So Sergeant Tewks put an empty hive in the back of his car to repay his neighbor, and with Bounce he drove up to Dawson Grimes' place.

"Skunks last night," Tewks explained.

"It's funny now, of course," said Grimes after he'd been told about it. "But not at the time, I guess."

"You're so right. And, speaking of skunks, Preachin' Annie is going to get her money back." And the sergeant related the day's events to the banker.

"I'm extremely glad to hear it."

"And she's going to start her mission. I made her promise."

"She is?"

"She invited me down for the night she opens, Dawson. Want to go along with me?"

"Well, now—Horatio, that's an idea. Sure, I'll go."

BLUEPRINT FOR REVOLUTION?

TWO PEOPLE from the States, down in Havana recently, had an interview with Fidel Castro, it seems. One man said something about having just seen Hemingway, and Castro is quoted as commenting about FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS—"We took the book into the hills, because it is the only book in English that tells us how to conduct a Civil War!" But, he continued, why wasn't Hemingway writing a book about him? The visitor replied that Hemingway didn't write about politicians. "Politicians? We are not politicians!" Castro is said to have replied. "We are social reformers. Our revolution took place to get the politicians out!"

dealer in fear

by . . . Avram Davidson

They were afraid, for their own reasons, to complain to the law. They'd a different method of stopping this man.

YEE AH-LU (Louie Yee to the townspeople) bent over his iron. His wife folded the warm shirts. Neither spoke. There *had* been a time when his little shop knew talk and laughter, but then their son was alive. He had died before he was old enough to look over the counter at the world beyond. Since then they had toiled in silence. The money had gone to a bank in China, and some day, when they would be too old to work, they had intended to go back and adopt a son to comfort their last days. He would worship with them at the ancestral shrines, would pray for them after they were dead.

Old Mrs. Yee wrapped the shirts around cardboards, inserted pins. Her hands moved automatically. There was nothing to say; the *Bah-lu* had said the last word. The Eighth Route Army, the People's Army, it had called itself—the Communist Army of Liberation. It had liberated their bank account. Nothing was left of thirty years' toil. And China was closed to them. *Mei-yo fah-dze*—There is nothing to be done

Avram Davidson had contributed extensively to Commentary *and other opinion magazines before beginning to write fiction some years ago. He took first prize, with his first mystery, in the annual EQMM Contest, and has since been translated into several languages, including Hebrew.*

about it. One worked, thankful to be left in peace, only.

The door opened and a man with a hard red face came in from outside.

"Immigration Department!" he barked, holding out a badge. The old couple stared at it, frozen. "Papers!" the man snapped. "Let's see your papers!" He pawed through the flat tin box set before him: an obsolete passport, an old application for citizenship, Consular statements —"No good!" The red-faced man glared at them. "Out of order!" He swung around to the old woman. "Where are hers?"

Old Yee tried to explain, his broken English exaggerated by fright, that his wife's papers had been burned many years ago. But he had been told that she was a citizen because she had married him before the New Laws.

"Burned up?" The man laughed. "That's what you Chinks always say. Nothing doing. Your papers are no good, and she hasn't any. Can you get any evidence that this is all true?"

Old Yee had little or no idea about what records might exist. "People all dead now," he stammered.

"None of *my* business. Too bad. No choice but deportation, I guess." The old woman began to wail. Her husband reached into the tin box. Underneath the birth certificate of Little Yee and the deeds to the grave plots near Canton, he found a package tied in red paper, thrust it at the intruder.

"Please. You take money. Give back papers. Not deport. Please. You take—"

He took it. As he was leaving, a jade *kwanyin* on a shelf caught his eye, and he took that, too. "Keep your mouths shut," was his parting word.

The old Yees bent over their iron and shirts. One worked. There was nothing else to do. Perhaps the man with the badge would return for more money. *Mei-yo fah-dze*—it cannot be helped."

Louie Yee . . . Charlie Hong . . . Wing How . . . small-town laundrymen . . . the man with the badge visited them all. Charlie Hong had bargained. In the end, knowing it didn't pay to take chances, he gave in. But Wing How had been a snap.

Wing How was very old. Shirts left with him were still ironed well, but it took time. Customers in a hurry went elsewhere. When the man with the hard red face and the badge had burst in, old Wing was dabbling with a Chinese paint-set. *Pussy willows!* He'd had a branch of it stuck in a jar and he was painting a picture of it when his revery was interrupted. Hundreds of dollars stashed away, and the old man spent his time painting pussy willows!

About that time it was, that two men had come calling at the apartment with the doorplate reading WALTER BIGGART, *DEALER IN OBJECTS OF ART*. The apartment was small, but very well furnished. Biggart gestured them to chairs. The one with the crew-cut red hair, who had flashed the F. B. I. card—Wilson was his name—introduced the other as "Mr. Kennedy of the Immigration and Naturalization Service." That one hung his long legs out of the deep-set chair, let the other start.

"Perhaps you, as a dealer in Chinese artifacts, have heard stories, Mr. Biggart, that someone has been extorting money from Chinese laundrymen by posing as an Immigration Officer?"

"Why, no. *I* hadn't heard. How shameful."

"Well, *we've* heard. We're interested for several reasons. Extortion is a felony. So is impersonating a Federal officer with intent to deceive. And Mr. Kennedy's department feels very strongly about anybody pulling this kind of stunt in their name."

Kennedy leaned foward. "Besides dirtying our name, this sort of thing clams up people we want to have confidence in us. We don't want the American Chinese to look on us as a bunch of shake-down artists. We're not concerned with terrorizing some poor slob who slipped in under dubious circumstances a generation ago. Matter of fact, if we *do* find such people, we give them the chance to leave the country and re-enter legally. Many of them have children who are American citizens by birth. Our job is to protect them by seeing that no Red agents slip into the States to blackmail them."

Biggart thrust his hands deep into the pockets of his silk dressing-gown. "Our tax money is going to help criminals legalize their position, is that what you mean?"

Kennedy said: "They're *not* criminals . . . the Chinese community is one of the most law-abiding in the country. If anything, *too* much so. Guy comes along, flashes a badge, shakes them down, and they never think to complain. They learned to be afraid of officials in the old country, and—"

Biggart yawned, looked at his watch. The two Federal men stood. "It is too bad," Wilson said, "that no one has complained to us directly. The ones who were victimized are still frightened. But we have our eyes open."

"Bully for youse," Biggart said. Wilson flushed.

"In the old days the tongs would offer a reward for the fellow's head," he said, "and some hatchetman would collect it. *I* wouldn't blame them. Stealing from people who sweat for every penny, even—I hear—trying to molest women—"

Biggart opened the door. Kennedy's long legs tangled, as if by accident, with the chair on which Biggart's jacket hung, and it tumbled over. Biggart dived for it, but not quickly enough by a second. Kennedy picked up the badge which fell out. It read, in large capitals, IMMIGRATION DEPARTMENT, and, in smaller letters, Dominion of Newfoundland. "What's this doing in your pocket?" he asked.

Biggart shrugged. "No law forbidding me to own a foreign badge. Just call it an object of art." They looked at him, at each other. Kennedy put the badge back.

Wilson said, "Be careful, Biggart." The dealer smiled, and closed the door.

Biggart had thought it might be well to lie low for a couple of months. The information about Arthur Chang, however, had been too tempting. Only Chinese in his town: that meant no one to tip him off. Small town: that meant he'd have no big-town savvy. No kids: that meant no ideas picked up in school about being Americans with rights . . . Just plain Arthur Chang, Chinese washee-man, with lots of hard-earned money.

This was a good business. Nobody to split with. Just drive the car out into the country every now and then. Scenery? He preferred things you could touch . . . the springy feel of a new deck of cards, the crisp compactness of a pile of hundred dollar bills, the smooth surface of old jade, the firm yet yielding quality of a young woman's flesh . . .

The laundry (and town, too) was like any other. *He* was at the iron, *she* was folding shirts. Biggart flashed the badge, keeping a finger over the words which showed it wasn't an American badge. *"Immigration!"* he snapped. "Let's see your papers—quick!"

Arthur Chang opened a drawer and pulled something out of it. "This is the only paper which concerns us," he said in perfect English. Biggart gasped at the single sheet, printed in English and Chinese, with his picture at the top. Not a photograph—it was a painting—it was his face—*WARNING! THIS MAN IS NOT A GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL*—but how—? Chang said to his wife, "Call the police!" Biggart came out of shock. He knocked Chang down. The woman took two swift steps; Biggart grabbed the collar of her dress. It ripped, exposing the ivory flesh beneath. She seized the iron and thrust it into his face. He heard his own sweat hiss at the searing touch, and screamed as the pain hit. Arthur Chang had produced a shotgun from somewhere. He raised it, fired.

The sheriff looked at the leaflet. "That's the slimy so-and-so to the life," he said. *"He'll* get it all right—if he lives. But how'd he come to pose for this?"

"I only had the one shell," Chang explained. "What? Oh, one of the men he robbed, old Wing How, is an amateur painter—did it from memory. See, some of our foreign-born people who have no children to draw them into the life of the community, are still afraid to complain to the law. Instead, Wing sent the painting to our tong, and they sent the leaflet out to warn the rest of us."

The sheriff nodded. "And this crook didn't know you was born and raised here," he said, admiring the picture. A thought struck him. "Better buy some more shells. Next week starts the hunting season. Might get us some fat bucks, hey?"

"We might at that," said Arthur Chang.

PREFERRED—PROFESSIONAL SPIES

WESTERN intelligence officials in Berlin have apparently found the Russians willing to accept the existence of straight spying and counter-spying, providing this is done by professionals, but extremely disturbed about what they—and others—call "sabotage" organizations. The British press described the recent stripping of a luxury villa in a West Berlin suburb as marking the end of one of these picturesque chapters in this post-war Berlin espionage story.

By the time it was decided to shut down the "Battlegroup Against Inhumanity", originally a refugee aid group, most Berliners knew about the goings on in the red-brick villa. These included instruction in the use of oriental poisons, the manufacture of incendiary and high-explosive materials, the use of teen-agers for sabotage operations in East Germany, and the recruiting of what was said to be hundreds of spies and informers. Much of the incendiary material and explosives was apparently sent to agents in East Germany in cans of food included in gift parcels.

Distress mounted about the group after severe sentences were handed down by the People's Police to many of their ill-trained teen-age saboteurs. Those who escaped execution are today serving life sentences in East German prisons. Relatives of many of these youngsters were said to have collaborated with West German officials in the effort to put a stop to the group's activities.

THE saint's RATINGS

You can't make a silk purse—

from a sow's ear. If you really want to bring that expression up to date, say that you can't make a readable book out of a TV program. Though we have long been vaguely aware of the intrinsic weakness of television stories, it has taken a book, patched together from one of these shows, to demonstrate their appalling quality. "Frightening" is the only word that applies. Such lack of content, plot, reality or humor has never been equalled before, even in the darkest days of the pulps. Will the gentlemen of publishers' row listen to our sincere request— no more of these! ***Make books out of movies, comic strips, or the pencilled inscriptions on subway pillars. But let the TV programs continue to rule the air waves—where we can destroy them instantly with a flick of the channel changer.***

OUR RATING SYSTEM:

- Three haloes: Outstanding
- Two haloes: Above average
- One halo: Passable reading
- A pitchfork: For the ash can

DEADLY WELCOME, by John D. MacDonald (Dial, 35¢)

Get it, read it, you can't go wrong. The name MacDonald on a book jacket still means that you are going to read a tightly knit, realistic and entertaining story.

5 WHO VANISHED, by Robert J. Levin (Pyramid, 35¢)

It is never made clear if the five short pieces in this book are fact or fiction, which makes the reader unsure of himself. Read as crime articles—which they seem to be—they are well paced and interesting.

THE HUSBAND, by Vera Caspary (Pyramid, 35¢)

This is a soap-opera homicide that continually skirts the edge of disaster. Only the experienced and smooth prose keeps it from slipping over. The soap-opera quality may be too much for the male readers, but women will love it.

THE HOUSE ON Q STREET, by Robert Dietrich (Dell, 25¢)

Stir up a millionaire, a murder, a sexy daughter—and this is the result. For some reason the book rises above the drabness of its material and makes good reading.

WALK SOFTLY, WITCH, by Carter Brown (Signet, 25¢)

Can you imagine a private eye who acts like an illiterate Mike Hammer?

THE NAKED CITY, by Stirling Silliphant (Dell, 25¢)

Taken from television. They can have it back.

mr. wong fights back

by . . . Charlotte and Dan Ross

IT WAS long past midnight when Mei Wong completed mixing a fresh lot of his special liquid jewel cleaner. The first hint he had of the unusual was the sound of a key being fitted in the locked door of his outer studio.

Quickly the elderly Chinese proprietor of the Bombay Art & Curio Co. snapped off the single light under which he'd been working and waited tautly in the darkness to see what would happen next.

The door swung open and in the brief period in which the intruder was outlined against the dimly lighted hallway he saw that it was one of the hotel porters, Dai Chital. Dai, clothed only in a loincloth. His naked body glistening.

Then the door closed and Mei Wong followed the intruder's progress in the blackness of the studio by the sound of his movements. Dai stumbled at the opposite side of the room and cursed. Wong guessed now that he was after the jewel shipment which had arrived early in the afternoon. Dai would know about it being in the wall safe. He'd

Bannerjee had warned him the man had a criminal record and that he should watch out for violence.

Charlotte and Dan Ross, of Lancaster, New Brunswick, Canada, return with this new story about the elderly Mei Wong, proprietor of the Bombay Art and Curio Company, and an occasional — and unwilling — catalyst for violence. Mei Wong, by now, is known here and all over the world.

been in the room cleaning windows when the delivery was made.

And Mei Wong remembered the warning about the fellow given him by Inspector Bannerjee of the Bombay police: "Dai has a criminal record. Watch out for trouble. He'd probably taken this porter job to hang about until a worthwhile haul turns up."

The old gentleman breathed cautiously, and waited in the small cubicle of a workroom. Dai had chosen a good moment for his theft. The unset diamonds and emeralds locked in the wall safe were worth a small fortune. And not yet insured! Tomorrow he'd planned carefully going over them and assigning the stones to various accounts. That was why he'd worked late to mix this special polish for their cleaning. He could have saved his time. Since he'd likely lose the gems. It could be worth his life to tackle Dai. The porter was young and powerful and Inspector Bannerjee had warned Wong that he had once been suspected of a killing.

Now the naked thief turned on a small flashlight and began to work carefully at the combination of the safe. It was obvious he was no amateur. Wong considered the distance from his hiding place to the desk near the center of the big treasure-filled room. In the top left drawer there was a gun. If he could only get his hands on it Dai wouldn't make off with his haul so easily.

But there was a big risk involved. Even though shielded by the darkness Mei Wong felt sure Dai would be alerted by the sound of any movement. And the floor boards of the studio had the habit of creaking dolefully under his great weight. The racks of porcelain and brass antiques would shield him part of the way —but any strange noise could warn Dai.

And then things might happen swiftly indeed. If the thief had a gun he'd probably take alarm and fire. Or there was the possibility of his making use of a silent but equally deadly weapon—a knife. Sweat broke out on Mei Wong's forehead in great moist beads. A decision must soon be made.

There was a slight clicking sound as Dai swung the wall safe open. Mai Wong watched as he hungrily began to empty it. It must be now! The porter was so busy with his plundering there was the bare chance he wouldn't hear him as he stealthily made his way across to the desk and the weapon inside it.

The art dealer advanced into the studio a step at a time. Meanwhile Dai examined a package of bound notes and thrust them in the small chamois-like bag strapped to his waist. Then the Indian clawed the jewel case from the safe.

Mei Wong was never sure

what gave him away. But in the next instant Dai wheeled quickly and turned the flashlight full on him.

"Stand where you are, old man!" The harsh voice rasped.

Mei Wong blinked in the direct rays of the flashlight. "Leave what you have taken and go and I will not call the police," he said.

Dai chuckled. "You will never call the police."

"You can't get away with those stones," Mei Wong warned the thief, "they're bound to be traced."

"I'm not a child, Wong," the porter's voice was mocking, "I have a good market waiting for them."

With astonishing agility in one so stout, the art dealer dodged from the circle of light and plunged toward the desk. Dai dropped the flashlight with a cry and ran toward the old man. Just as Wong reached out for the desk drawer he intercepted him. As they struggled in the darkness the art dealer realized why Dai had stripped himself of his clothes. The thief had covered his body with mutton-fat to help elude possible capture.

Wrestling hopelessly with his slippery opponent, Wong's breath came in painful gasps. And now the hands of Dai closed around his throat. He flailed at the thief's body with ebbing strength. Locked in the uneven combat they swayed back and forth in the murky room. As they crashed against a rack filled with bronze figures it went toppling to the floor. In desperation Mei Wong's hands closed on a heavy candlestick. Mustering his last ounce of strength he wielded it clublike on the porter's head. Dai gave a loud grunt and the sinewy hands released their grip on the art dealer's throat.

As the porter stumbled backward against the desk Wong tore away the thief's bag with its loot and padded quickly to the small back room. Now Dai was on his feet again and stumbling after the old art dealer.

"You're finished, old one," the porter's tone was sinister.

A sudden shaft of moonlight penetrated the venetian blinds and Mei Wong was certain he saw the glint of a knife as Dai's hand raised from his loincloth. The thief came slowly toward him, his body crouched. The dealer backed closer to his workbench and with his free hand reached out and grasped the container of jewel cleaner.

Without hesitating he hurled the contents over Dai. As the fluid showered him the thief screamed and staggered back blindly. Taking advantage of the surprise Wong made for his desk and brought out a gun. Then he switched on the big desk light.

The howling Dai was too occupied with his misery to see that

Mei Wong had him safely covered with the weapon or notice the art dealer reached for his phone.

Within minutes the police were escorting a subdued Dai from the room.

"When I found he was covered with mutton-fat I realized I had an extra weapon at my disposal," Mei Wong explained to an interested Inspector Bannerjee, "my jewel cleaning fluid has a strong acid reaction to fats. I fear Dai Chital has more than just his fingers burned this time."

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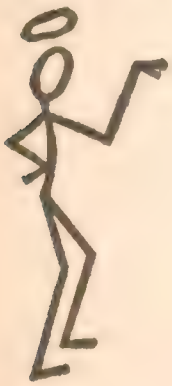

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what's new in crime

by . . . Hans Stefan Santesson

Recent essays in the rather deadly arts—novels that you will wish to relax with, and others which reflect our times.

A VERY great man, a courageous man, is being buried as I write this, and we bow our heads—today and in days to come—in silent tribute to this genuinely dedicated man who was, to Europe and to Asia, and to the World, the personification of our Foreign Policy in this age of transition.

It is not inappropriate to remember that this man, who carried one of the heaviest burdens borne by any statesman today, turned every evening—after his seventeen-hour working day—to the mystery novel. Those forty-five minutes every night, before he finally switched off his bedside lamp, were the only relaxation *not* ordered by his doctor.

There is reason to believe that the words *Hamilton Burger* may, in time (this may already have happened in legal circles) become a synonym for petulant vindictiveness at the official level—a synonym for a particular type of official that unfortunately *does* exist outside the pages of novels such as these. Perry Mason and Burger have carried on their feud in many novels, but in none, as

Once more comments on current mystery and suspense novels—by both British and American writers—novels which, in their variety, illustrate this column's frequent (perhaps too frequent) preachment that there is really no such thing as a simple definition of the mystery novel in these days.

far as I can remember, has Burger taken the chances that he takes (*yes—Burger!*) in Erle Stanley Gardner's THE CASE OF THE MYTHICAL MONKEYS (Morrow, $2.95), in which Mason finds it unexpectedly difficult to convince Mauvis Meade, a reticent (and decorative) lady author, that it is safe to talk in order to save her secretary, Gladys Doyle (also quite decorative) who is accused of murder.

Patrick Dawlish had been half convinced her fear of being murdered was unfounded, but he couldn't forget Marion Ard's look as she'd said, "You're sorry you can't help, but what will you say when I am dead?" He'd investigated—had seen nothing—and was due to leave on a cruise, the next day, with his wife.

But Marion Ard had been right. She *was* killed. And her body was left in his home.

Dawlish, returning hurriedly from Egypt, finds himself both hunted and hunter, the Scotland Yard official in charge convinced Dawlish had murdered the girl—*and* the others who die—as he hunts a murderer in Gordon Ashe's excellent THE PACK OF LIES (Doubleday, $2.95). Do read this!

The yacht had been waylaid by a raider and boarded by men in disguise, who'd killed a member of the crew before escaping. Hugh Curtis, a young newspaperman, and red-headed Mollie Bourne, star-reporter of a rival newspaper, make a likable but not exactly earth-shaking team as they try to solve the mystery in Paul Somers' OPERATION PIRACY (Harper's, $2.95). Pleasant—but no more.

It'd been a foggy winter morning as a fight in the work area had distracted the guards, and Rory MacShane had slipped into the chill mist that hung over the moors and disappeared.

Two months after he'd escaped from Dartmoor, Rory MacShane—and the man he'd shielded when he'd been sentenced—were both in the fell country up north which one of them had known as a youngster, and where Superintendent MacDonald, C.I.D., had recently bought a home. MacDonald (the jacket to the contrary) *not* yet retired, is drawn into the search for the man who may be responsible for a strange death discovered in a deserted house, and for other events. The result, in E. C. R. Lorac's THE LAST ESCAPE (Doubleday, $2.95) is some beautiful character studies, characteristic Lorac suspense, and a loving description of a countryside similar to that many of us once knew.

Solar Pons was born in Prague circa 1880, the son of Asenath Pons, a consular official at

Prague, and of Roberta McIvor Pons. Pons, Oxford *summa cum laude,* 1899, established a private inquiry practice at 7B Praed Street in 1907 (possibly at the suggestion of the Master, with whom he was in frequent touch in later years), and served in British Intelligence in both World Wars. Widely traveled, he is the author of a number of monographs including AN INQUIRY INTO THE NAN-MATAL RUINS OF PONAPE (1905) THE VARIETIES OF THE CRIMINAL METHOD (1911), THE INDUCTIVE PROCESS (1921), ON THE VALUE OF CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE (1925) and AN EXAMINATION OF THE CTHULHU CULT AND OTHERS (1931).

Pons, whose life—whose work—whose thinking—whose gentle (and often less gentle) irony is described in the pastiches of August Derleth, has been held to come closest to capturing the true flavor of the Sherlock Holmes saga, and to making its times and its people more credible in these more hurried days.

Conceded. But, apart from this, there is something persuasive—something *extremely* persuasive—about this "tall, thin gentleman wearing an Inverness cape" as, time after time, he is rescued from boredom by the advent of a distressed client, or as he faces, in THE ADVENTURE OF THE CAMBERWELL BEAUTY (in the book under discussion) the tallest Chinese Parker had ever seen, thin and very old, his body cloaked in Mandarin robes of singular richness . . .

August Derleth's THE RETURN OF SOLAR PONS (Mycroft & Moran, $4.00), a group of these stories, includes several that first appeared in this magazine. I strongly and emphatically recommend the book to you. These are stories that you will read and read again, half-conscious, each time, of Pons' quizzical look as he watches you, "his angular chin cupped in one long-fingered hand", his eyes half-closed, a ghostly smile on his lips . . .

Reverend Martin Buell returns to his Montana parish, in NEVER TURN YOUR BACK (Doubleday, $2.95) and discovers that his congregation has replaced his shabby, comfortable house with a chrome and plate glass monstrosity. And he also discovers murder. . . . As usual, pleasant and relaxing. Don't miss this latest Father Buell novel!

Christopher Bush's recent THE CASE OF THE FLOWERY CORPSE (Macmillan, $2.95) again brings us that urbane representative of the British upper middle-classes, Ludovic Travers. Mr. Travers is introduced to a number of unusual characters in the course of his hunt for the murderer.

Dr. Lillian Whitehall, who has maintained a method of psychotherapeutical practice in her home, has been murdered. There is a possibility that the "alarmingly beautiful" Anna Bardossy, a former doctor who had escaped from Hungary in 1954 and had been Dr. Whitehall's assistant, may have killed her. Helen Nielsen fashions out of this, in her THE FIFTH CALLER (Morrow, $2.95), an appealing story, as Douglas Marshall of the D. A.'s office, in two minds about Anna Bardossy, searches for the truth.

Henry Brinton's mildly wordy DRUG ON THE MARKET (Macmillan, $2.75) was, quite correctly, described as "anything but a tranquilizer." This is a pleasant thriller about pleasant and mildly credible people. Hollywood will undoubtedly be interested in the amateur detective, John Strang, MP, who has an inconvenient habit of stumbling onto mayhem.

Marc Miller's DEATH IS A LIAR (Arcadia, $2.75) admittedly proves this point. Patricia Garrett is a pleasant enough heroine as she investigates the strange death of her cousin.

"Once in a while—but not nearly often enough" (to quote the introduction) "an editor or publisher discovers an early mystery by a now established novelist," proof of the reality that many novelists (Daphne DuMaurier, Van Wyck Mason and J. P. Marquand, to mention three) have first worked in this medium.

We do not learn what Peter Curtis—who is not Peter Curtis, of course—thinks of NO QUESTION OF MURDER (Doubleday, $2.95), but it is to be hoped that the author views the novel with more understanding than others who once worked in this field and are distressed to be reminded of their early sins—unwarrantably distressed, I might add.

There is an unfortunate tendency, as I have said before, to down-grade the quality of writing in the mystery field. This is unfortunate and not justified, for far more is demanded, in literateness and in professional competence, of the better mystery writer than is sometimes conceded even along Publisher's Row. A hundred years from now—two hundred years from now—social historians will refer to novels in this field as social portraits of these times. It is not unimportant to remember this in evaluating novels such as this. Richard Curwen—and equally so, Antonia Meekin—are *extremely* interesting personalities — and Emma Plume a most unusual instrument of justice. Do read this.

miss sillithorpe's hobby

by . . . Lee Chaytor

Introducing the first psionic detective—as he meets a pawn of the Will to Evil. . . .

"If Scotland Yard's come up with a psionic detective, God help the poor criminal," murmured the Very Important Personage, glancing over the latest Honours List. "It hardly seems sporting, somehow. I mean, the odds will be so uneven."

"I'll take issue with that," drawled the lean, distinguished gentleman with the pointed ears. "The better the sleuth, the more dangerous the antagonists he unearths. Jamie Jarvis is an amazing chap, granted; but he's had to give best to the Powers of Darkness a time or two that I know of."

"Oh—if you're going to go spooky on us—" shrugged the VIP, opening his cigar case.

"Aren't all criminals either the pawns or the agents of the Will to Evil?" smiled the man with the pointed ears. "Still, if it'll relieve your mind, there isn't a man in England less spooky than the estimable Mr. Jarvis — Lord Jarvis, as now is. He's got the wholesome, guileless face and the nice behavior of a well-brought-up ten year old. You're fighting the impulse to pat him on the

Readers of our companion magazine will remember Lee Chaytor as the author of OPERATION DISASTER (Fantastic Universe, *October 1958*), BAIT FOR THE TIGER (F. U., *May 1958*) *and other stories. A teacher, in California, the author has long been interested in the possibilities of men like Jamie Jarvis.*

head and give him a half a crown, when you find yourself impaled by those searching gray eyes—pinned down and thoroughly scrutinized — and suddenly you are the ten year old and Jamie Jarvis is the most redoubtable of Nannies. And believe me, the Father Image isn't in it with a nice, conscientious, uncompromising Nanny."

"The this - hurts - me - more - than - it - does - you school?" suggested the VIP with a hint of a sneer.

Pointed Ears shook his head. "No. There's never a trace of hypocrisy in Jamie, just inflexible standards and a pitying wonder that all men can't live up to them. While implacably preventing or putting an end to sin, he grieves over the sinner most sincerely."

"You seem to have made rather a study of the subject," commented the VIP.

The man with the pointed ears smiled. "I know a bit about his cases, including the one that got him hoicksed up to The Yard in the first place, long before anyone recognized his—ah—unusual talents. Even at that time he had the dedicated terrier touch—but then, so does any respectable rozzer. I don't suppose you'd want to hear about Miss Sillithorpe's Hobby?"

"You intend telling us, so we might as well relax and enjoy it," sighed the VIP, and settled himself comfortably into his chair.

At first glance, Miss Eustacia Sillithorpe seemed to be one of those charming old ladies who are still found occasionally in the quiet backwaters of great cities, relics of a gentler and more leisured age when well-born females, if unmarried, lavished their lives on Good Works and innocuous hobbies.

There had been three Sillithorpe sisters living at 19 Siva Place. The second, Miss Sybil, painted china. She painted it to such good effect that she filled a quite remarkable number of what-nots and cabinets before her older sister called a halt to such unbridled creativity. Miss Sybil pleaded and wept, but being no match for her strong-willed sister, finally yielded. Deprived of her only interest, she soon embarked upon the decorous decline which terminated in her well-bred and uncomplaining demise.

The youngest sister, Miss Chlorinda, glued sea-shells on small, oddly-shaped boxes. When every one of the small circle of their acquaintance had been gifted not once but several times with these containers, Chlorinda turned to cats.

"At least they're *alive,* Eustacia," she protested, when Miss Sillithorpe objected.

"They carry vermin, must be let out and in constantly, and they *smell.* Get rid of them," commanded Miss Sillithorpe.

Chlorinda was made of sterner

stuff than Sybil. Setting her lips, she refused. They quarreled, venomously but with voices carefully lowered lest the servants overhear. The difference of opinion resolved itself soon after, however, when Chlorinda ceased to be a disputant. Miss Sillithorpe reported that her unfortunate sister had tripped over one of her pets at the head of the cellar stairs.

Miss Eustacia, returning home from the funeral, surveyed the Victorian parlor with satisfaction. At last! So nice not to have to provide any more whatnots for Sybil's absurd hand-crafting! Such a relief to be free forever from the odor of glue and cats! The servants were well-trained, stupid and incurious. Nothing now to prevent one from devoting oneself to one's own fascinating new hobby, already well, if unobtrusively, launched. Seating herself in the bow window which overlooked the street, Miss Sillithorpe took up her knitting.

Neighbors passing along Siva Place greeted her with restrained civility, which soon changed to discreet curiosity as the weeks grew into months and she did nothing but sit there, dressed in black against which her strong white hands seemed to move with a life of their own, plunging the glittering steel needles into many-colored wool. There would have been considerably more curiosity had they seen the object she was knitting.

It curled its snake-length from her lap to the floor. It was a fairly narrow piece, for all its length, made up of squares of varied design and color, no two alike yet all together suggesting some obscure pattern or purpose. A muffler or scarf, perhaps, but for what neck designed? A facetious person might have suggested a giraffe; but few people entered Miss Sillithorpe's parlor, and they, when they left, were not inclined to be facetious. There she sat, day in and year out, knitting and watching with passionate intensity those who walked by on the street below. Recluse though she was, she managed to know a good deal about her neighbors; and of what she learned, she disapproved of the most part. Day in and year out, her neighbors passed under her eye and—then ceased to be. Many families, disturbed by the increasing number of funeral corteges which passed along the Place, complained of unhealthy drains and moved away. Newer, coarser faces turned to stare up at the silent, endlessly occupied figure, until, at length, no person remained who had known Miss Sillithorpe. Her communion, though reduced, still embraced her one old servant, and the grocer, milkman, baker, fish-monger and the carter who brought the coals in the winter and ice in the summer.

In settling the accounts with these—for she permitted no one but herself to handle her money—she kept abreast of the dwindling fortunes of Siva Place. Things might have gone on in this way for a very long time indeed, had it not been for Police Officer Jamie Jarvis and the 31st of October.

Jamie Jarvis, in those days a most ambitious young police officer, had been assigned to 'straighten up the records' by a Captain who foresaw an uncomfortable amount of new-broom efficiency from the eager young recruit. Jamie, accepting the task with dedicated intensity, raised quite a dust both literally and figuratively, poking his nose into every record which had been kept since the station was built, making what he called a "tabulation".

"Tribulation, that's what he is, the perishin' young pusher," growled Captain Bull.

"What d'you want to go ferretin' about like that for?" asked the desk sergeant, sneezing. "Them ruddy cases is all ancient history, solved *or* unsolved."

But young Officer Jarvis, with something suprarational inside him and beginning to sound an alarm, only smiled respectfully and persisted, and the tabulation grew and took shape. And the shape it took wiped the smile from Jamie's nice, dust-streaked face. Being now most amply occupied with more routine duties by his unsympathetic superiors, he pursued his investigations on his own time, pestering local doctors, prying into the records of the coroner and the local hospital, and even, eventually, calling at the offices of several insurance companies. When he drew blank there, he was not reassured; rather, he was the more disturbed. Greed is, after all, a natural human trait. The shape of the pattern, like those in Miss Sillithorpe's knitting, though obscure, suggested an unpleasant and abnormal purpose.

"So there's been a few deaths in the district in the last twenty years," scoffed Captain Bull, when the young officer requested permission to make an official investigation. "I'd be worried if there hadn't been. Us ordinary bobbies can cope with a plain ordinary murder or a natural death, but Life Everlasting's something else again." He shook his jowls at Jamie's worried face. "You're up from the counties, eh? Not used to big city slums. You'll learn soon enough. Whole district's a rabbit warren. Can't walk along a street without wadin' knee-deep in Teddy boys. Why don't you organize a Boys' Club if you've got so much spare time?"

"There have been," said Jamie quietly, "exactly three times as many deaths in this one district as in all the other areas of the city added together."

That gave the captain pause, but only momentarily. "Slum conditions," he shrugged. "Yes, there's a dozen families in every one of those filthy old Victorian rat-traps. They catch things from one another."

"Not that kind of deaths," persisted Jamie. "Doctors have to report deaths from contagious diseases as such. I'm talking about accidents, deaths by misadventure. Even—" he hesitated and blushed, "what they used to call declines, wastings away . . ."

Raucous hoots of laughter silenced him then; and in the days following, as the story got around, he was subjected to innumerable solicitous inquiries as to the state of his health: "Not going into a decline, are you, Jarvis?" "Looking a bit wasted away this morning, Jamie!" and so on. Jamie set his jaw and continued to prowl about on his own time. He had no idea what he was looking for, but like a good terrier, he had a scent and couldn't help digging. And his researches led him, finally, to Siva Place.

This grimy, undistinguished street seemed, oddly enough, to be the infection spot, the focus of death. Strangely—for it was not a main thoroughfare—a surprising number of traffic accidents occurred along the four short blocks which made up its crescent length. Dwellers in the shabby tenements furnished remarkable proof of the actuarial postulate that there's no place like home for dangerous misadventures. In Siva Place, stairways pulled loose from rotting walls and collapsed with their human freight. Torn carpets tripped the unwary; railings gave way, ceilings fell in, and gas pipes, slipping unaccountably from their metal nipples, asphyxiated the wretched inhabitants of Siva Place. Taken singly, or even taken apart from the statistics for the other districts, the unfortunate happenings presented no supernatural implications. As Captain Bull said, it was a run-down district—accidents will happen when buildings are old and uncared-for. But when Jamie compared the total number of fatal mischances with the number of such occurrences elsewhere in the city, he knew that his nagging inner unease had to be acted upon.

It was a dreary damp afternoon late in October when he stood at the head of the street, staring gloomily along its curving length. As Captain Bull had said, the place was a warren of rotting, once pretentious mansions, ugly in decay and aswarm with filthy slimy-faced children, a breeding-place for disease and worse. One house, in the middle of the block, had escaped the general deterioration. Its wrought iron fence palings were all intact, their sharpened points gleaming with new paint. The door had recently been painted, and the curtains at the

windows were freshly starched. Though the uneven sidewalks elsewhere on the block were chalked with hopscotch patterns and indecent phrases, the area in front of this one house was comparatively free of markings. Jamie strolled closer, pondering the incongruity of the well-preserved mansion. He had reached that stage of frustration when one grasps at absurdities, incongruities, any clue to provide a means of egress from the labyrinth.

At this moment, with the wailing shrieks of lost souls, a gaggle of small weird figures sallied into the dusky street and up to one of the doorways. A thrill of horror rippled along Jamie's nerves at the hideous half-glimpsed faces, the claw-like hands, the thin legs leaping and capering in an obscene witches' sabbath. The delusion held for a moment; then Jamie recognized the words of their wailing chant, and the scene shifted into normal focus. The hobgoblins were only children, dressed in ragged improvised costumes, their faces made up with burnt cork. They were playing a game introduced by generous and nostalgic American soldiers stationed far from home and their own children. To the accompaniment of shrill cries of "Hallowe'en treats! Trick or treat!" the children were begging from door to door.

Watching them, Jamie felt a surge of unbearable pity. What kind of treats would a child receive from the inhabitants of Siva Place? He felt in his pockets automatically, jingling some coins.

"Hoi!" he called. "Over here!"

The small beggars raced up; and others, further away, saw the movement and came running to share the windfall. They swirled across the cobbled street toward Jamie like withered leaves swept before a searching gale. And like a giant mower, implacable, terrible, a great black car skidded around the corner and rushed inexorably down on the children, tires screeching, horn blaring with inhuman insolence.

Jamie leaped forward and swept a double armful of maladorous humanity from its path. Somehow the others scattered from beneath the very wheels of juggernaut, falling and screaming imprecations as they fell. Jamie had a flash of a swarthy, young-old face, handsome and evil, grinning above the wheel of the car,—then it was past. He dropped the children and writhed around to get a look at the license before the car disappeared. There was no need for haste. Suddenly, irrationally, when it was just beyond Miss Sillithorpe's house, the car bounced back as though it had run into a stone wall. It skidded onto the sidewalk, tires bursting. Metal screamed, glass shattered, a yel-

low sports-jacketed body crashed through the windshield and, describing an arc, impaled itself upon the iron railing.

Jamie stared horrified at the shambles. Around him the children stirred and murmured. There was a flash of movement at the upper edge of Jamie's vision. In the bow window directly above the car, a woman was leaning forward, with a sort of sharp professional attention which Jamie found more disturbing, in the circumstances, than the ghoulish interest of the gathering crowd. He had seen just such a look on the face of a police surgeon during an on-the-spot operation he had witnessed. As he began routinely to clear the crowd away from the car, a police car whirled around the corner, bell clanging imperatively.

It appeared that the officers had been chasing the occupant of the black car after a daring smash and grab jewel robbery. Sergeant Culross spotted Jamie and came over to him.

"What happened? How did you stop him?"

Jamie frowned. "I didn't. It was as though he'd run into a stone wall, or a steel cable. The car actually bounced backward and then slewed over onto the sidewalk . . ."

Sergeant Culross surveyed the scene dubiously. "No sign of an obstruction. Might have been some freak carom off one of those cobbles. If he'd hit it at just the right angle with his right front tire—"

Jamie nodded vaguely. He was feeling for the inner area of unease, gingerly, as one probes an aching tooth. Was this the tragic event foreshadowed by his hunch or premonition of evil? To his dismay he realized that his sense of impending disaster was stronger than ever.

"Cosso's dead, sir," reported a green-faced officer. "The spike went right through him. It's—a mess."

"Search the car. There ought to be a packet of loot—he hasn't had time to get rid of it," ordered Culross. "And move those sightseers on."

"I think we should ask these kids where Cosso lived," ventured Jamie. Then, answering the sergeant's inquiring stare, he explained, "Siva Place is a crescent. Curves around to a dead end in the next block. And there's a mews with garages big enough to hide a car this size. Stands to reason a crook as successful as Cosso'd have his escape route planned in advance. He was going down this street for a reason. These kids don't miss a thing."

The ambulance came and picked up the remains of Benni Cosso; a police car towed away the twisted wreck of his car; soon all that was left of the late crook was a sanded, dark brown stain on the sidewalk in front of the

neat mansion. One thing had caught Jamie's attention as they were removing the car. Caught in the front bumper was a piece of gray wool thread. He almost missed it in the dark; when he realized what it was, he turned to look at the woman in the bow window, now busily knitting.

Could she — fantastic as the thought seemed—have had anything to do with the crash-up? Some blinding flash of light in Cosso's eyes, perhaps, at a moment when he needed to watch the road? As his attention focused on Miss Sillithorpe's house, Jamie's sense of unease sharpened to a palpable pang. He found himself pushing through the crowd to the scrubbed front steps which led up to her door.

An ancient crone in maid's neat black and white answered his ring, muttered that Miss Sillithorpe was not at home and prepared to shut the door. Jamie thrust a foot in adroitly, snapped "Police business," and pushed past her into the parlor. It was crowded with red plush and cherrywood furniture, dark portraits in tarnished gilt frames, and an incredible amount of hand-painted china on little shelves and tables. But the first, overpowering impression was a wave of sickly-sour air, thick as a fog, that swept out to envelop him. Though there was nothing to see, it clung to his skin and irritated his nostrils like the worst pea-soup fog that had ever rolled up from the stinking tide flats below the docks. Jamie's sensitive nostrils flared as he forced himself to walk towards the woman seated in the window. As he drew near her, his fingers began to prickle at the tips as though the circulation was just being restored to his hands. A tag of verse rose in his memory—

"By the pricking of my thumbs
Something evil this way comes."

Jamie cursed all superstitions and saluted the black-robed woman with the full, wax-yellow face. She was knitting at a long strip of something which lay coiled untidily around her feet, and she did not look up for a moment.

Jamie's mother and two sisters were enthusiastic knitters, and from his youth he had observed various woolen garments in the process of construction, yet never had he seen anything remotely resembling this. He could hardly take his eyes from it as he began, "I beg your pardon for intruding, Madame. I am a police officer. I wondered if you could shed any light on the tragic accident which has just occurred—" He paused, disturbed by a sharp similarity between the knitting in the old lady's hands and something he had seen recently. The square she was working on had a black background shot across by jagged spears of bright yellow

and splashes of red. It was a barbaric pattern, raw and cruel; but the thing which attracted Jamie's attention was the way the red splashes were developing. As Miss Sillithorpe knitted, her wool jerked out of a huge bag hung on the arm of her chair. This wool seemed to be the kind known as variegated. Its raw scarlet tone was blending into a rusty red, and as more came from the bag, Jamie could see it was brown. Like dried blood. *Black and yellow and blood red, turning to brown* . . . From Jamie's inner self came the challenge:

"Where do you buy your wool?"

As soon as the words left his lips, Jamie blushed and wondered why in the name of sanity he'd asked a question like that. Miss Sillithorpe, however, ignored the challenge, and attacked at a different point. Steel needles flashing, she stared at Jamie.

"Officer, I feel the police have been grossly negligent in their duty. I have frequently observed this creature whose vehicle just crashed against my front steps, as he drove it down Siva Place. He was an ill-bred lout who sounded his horn unnecessarily. I found him annoying. I am not sorry he is dead."

Jamie tried to conceal his feelings under a mask of professional aplomb. "There must be a number of street noises which irritate you, in a district like this, Madame." Keep the suspect talking—*the suspect?* Where had that come from?

Dark brown wool jerked savagely from the capacious bag. "True." Miss Sillithorpe bit off her words. "The Place is badly run down. But I was born here and I do not intend to be routed." She glared out the window into the darkened street. The adult loungers had dispersed, but gangs of screaming children darted about under the street lamps. Miss Sillithorpe compressed her lips. "One does what one can."

She finished the square, nipped the wool between long, sharp teeth and plunged her needles through the knitting. The steel tips protruded as the iron railing had done from Cosso's body. Jamie felt sick. Common sense, reason, the evidence of his senses —all vouched for the innocence of this woman who sat before him, her eyes behind puffy yellow lids glittering with triumphant malice. Yet he could swear, with inner certainty, that she herself was the focus of the evil which scourged the district.

Pallid lips parted over long yellow teeth. "Well, young man? I presume you had some reason for forcing your way into my home?"

Impregnable, she was playing with him, and they both knew it. Jamie tried again, doggedly. "Did you see any obstruction in the road—just before the

crash, I mean? I can't understand why the car swerved as it did."

Miss Sillithorpe's eyes gleamed. She permitted herself a smile. "A most fortuitous—accident."

Jamie had a searing vision of himself bringing Miss Sillithorpe into the charge room: Offense—causing all the accidents which occurred in the district for the last fifty years. Weapon— a pair of knitting needles and some very unusual wool. He forced himself to meet her smile. He spoke with all the passion of his strong, wholesome goodness.

"Madame. I am warning you. There must be no more such fortuitous accidents."

"It would be interesting to know how you propose to stop them."

Jamie did not recognize his own voice. "You have a dangerous—partner, one not noted for loyalty to his servants, especially when they are found out."

The woman smiled derisively. Jamie thought: *I'm treating her as though I believed she was a witch* . . . He had a picture of Captain Bull's face when he tried to tell him the deaths were the result of witchcraft.

Apt on that thought, Miss Sillithorpe spoke. "Are you going to arrest me for practicing Black Magic? You'll end in an insane asylum, with many another too-outspoken fool."

It was Jamie's turn to smile. "I'm going to arrest you for murder—malicious, premeditated murder. I'll swear you deliberately shone a mirror into the eyes of Benni Cosso, to make him lose control of his steering and cause his death."

She was leaning toward him, incredulity conflicting with the beginning of fear. "There is no mirror! I shall tell them—"

"That your master, the Devil, caused the deaths? Then who'd be judged insane?" He grinned at her, sure that he was on the right track now. "You and I know there is no mirror. But there'll be one, when you come to trial."

"I shall never come to trial. I have protection. I'll call—"

"Better plead guilty. The One we know of has no patience with failure and He won't risk exposure. It suits his purpose that men should think He is an outgrown superstition."

She was leaning forward in her chair, the sweat of fear and fury shiny on her face, as Jamie left the room.

Standing on the steps outside Miss Sillithorpe's front door, Jamie wiped his own face. What in the name of all that was holy had he been up to? That queer inner compulsion which had carried him through the interview was ebbing now, leaving a very troubled young police officer to cope with the situation it had created. He set his jaw. *I'll honor the commitment,* he thought.

What was done was right. And he began to wonder where he could pick up an antique hand-mirror. Interrupting his thoughts, a trio of small children, dressed respectively as a gypsy, a witch and a ghost, ran up the steps.

"Hallowe'en treats!" they demanded shrilly.

Jamie had an urgent conviction that these grimy revellers should not disturb Miss Sillithorpe. "One does what one can," she had said . . .

"Look here, kids. The lady who lives here doesn't like to be bothered—"

The largest child made rude noises, echoed faithfully by the younger ones. "Trick 'r treat!" they clamored. Jamie thrust his hand in his pocket, held some coins just out of their reach.

"Stay away from this house if you know what's good for you!"

They seized the money and were off, shrieking, down the street. Jamie felt like a fool. Confronted with the obvious normality of Siva Place, his recent interview became grotesque . . . insane . . . Captain Bull was right. Time he was settling down to work and forgetting this nonsense. He left Miss Sillithorpe's steps and started down the street, as a slender figure in a horned mask glided past him and up the steps toward the door. He hung on his heel for a moment, debating whether to buy off this latest hobgoblin as he had the other three. Then he took himself in hand. Can't hang about all night keeping the brats from her door, he told himself. Besides, what are you afraid of? He walked on a few steps; then, irresistibly, his head turned back toward Miss Sillithorpe's house. There was no one on the doorstep. Jamie shrugged and walked on.

Two discoveries of a sensational nature were made in Siva Place that night. Cosso's hide-out, discovered, as Jamie had predicted, above a garage in the next block, yielded up a fortune in stolen gems. Jamie received due credit.

An elderly recluse, Miss Eustacia Sillithorpe, was found dead by her maid just before midnight, strangled in the folds of some sort of scarf she had been knitting. Jamie was heard to remark that the verdict would be "Death at the hands of person or persons unknown." He was right, and again received credit — unofficially.

"And that," said the man with the pointed ears, "was Jamie's first brush with the extranormal. He got rather better at it as he went on, but I'm not sure he's entirely comfortable with his psi powers, even yet."

"Are you seriously claiming—" began the VIP with a frown.

The other smiled. "Makes a good story, doesn't it?"

—Continued from Back Cover

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